

Pier Paolo Pasolini

Una vita violenta



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A violent life

Garzanti

*To Carlo Bo and Giuseppe Ungaretti, my witnesses in the trial against
«Ragazzi di vita».*

PART ONE

1. WHO WAS THOMAS

Tommaso, Lello, Zucabbo and the other kids who lived in the little shack village on Via dei Monti di Pietralata, as always after lunch, arrived in front of the school at least half an hour early.

However, there were already other pipelletti from the village around there, playing in the mud with their knives. Tommaso, Lello and the others started watching them, crouching around, with their school bags scraping on the mud: then two or three came with a ball, and the others threw the school bags onto a small hill, and ran behind the school, into the clearing where it was the central square of the village.

Lello and someone who lived in the second lot, next door, threw their fingers to divide each other. Tommasino, on the other hand, didn't feel like playing, and he got busy with two other threes on the floor, watching the match.

«What, has the maestro arrived in Carle?» he asked a little finger standing next to him.

«What do I know!» he replied, shrugging his shoulders.

«Who's here today, having dinner and cleaning?» he asked after a while Tommasino, who had been absent in those two or three days, because he had had a fever.

"Lello, I think," said Carletto.

«Aòh, can you smoke for me?» he then asked, turning suddenly, angry, to another, who was smoking nearby crouched on a tuff.

Tommasino got up and went towards the door, on the other side, where Lello, bent at the waist, with his cuffs wide and his arms outstretched, but ready to throw himself, was carefully aiming the game, with a sour face.

«To Lello!» said Tommasino.

"Go away, what do you want?" she did without bothering Lello at all. "What, are you cleaning at school today?" "Yes," Lello replied dryly, without giving the matter any weight.

Tommasino sat down near the pile of breccole that served as a post for the door. After a while, Lello turned back to look at him.

«And get away... but what do you want,' he said, immediately turning his back on him, and looking straight towards the center of the pitch, where the others were running after the ball screaming their deaths at each other. Tommasino didn't say another word: and calmly, keeping his legs crossed

on the dry mud, he took a piece of cigarette from the bottom of his pocket and lit it.

After a while Lello gave him another look, and pretended that he was smoking. He remained silent, still looking towards the field, then said in a lower and hoarse voice: "Let Tomà smoke."

Tommaso took a few more puffs quickly, then stood up and went to give the cigarette to Lello, who took it without losing sight of the game, and began to smoke, squinting, always ready to throw himself in.

Tommaso remained standing behind him, with his hands in the pockets of his shorts which were held up with a string, and were so large that they looked like a petticoat.

At that moment the kids arrived in front of the goal, in a crowd, and one of those who were playing against, all tied up, managed to drop a kick on the ball, which rolled not too hard near the pile of broken stones: Lello made a dive, even if he didn't he needed it, because he could catch it even if he bent down a little, and he threw the ball back into the center of the clearing. He picked up the cigarette butt that he had thrown away, and took a few puffs, completely satisfied.

«You're strong, Lè», Tommaso told him.

The other guy didn't answer him at all, but you could see that he really felt strong, smoking like a slut.

«Aòh, to Lè, who, tell me, the master can do it for me too, to do some cleaning today?» Tommaso asked after a while, making an indifferent face.

"Let's see," said Lello, reassured, playing the game with less fury, as he was already almost bored of it. Tommasino sat down next to him: but they only stayed there for a little while longer, because after a few minutes those who had remained at the back, near the school, started shouting and making signs with their hands. The teacher had arrived and it was time to go in. Those who were playing football kicked a few more times, then ran, jostling and arguing, to collect their school bags from the pile, and entered through the broken gate into the school courtyard.

After two or two thirty, life in Pietralata was back under control. All you could see were gangs of puppets in the middle of the lots, or a few women doing the work. There was nothing but sun and zella, zella and sun. But it was still March, and the sun was setting quickly, down behind Rome. The air became dim and almost frozen again. As the kids came out of school, it was almost sunset: and the village was still deserted, because the workers

left work later, the cinema had just opened, and the two or three bars were still crowded with the usual hopeless.

The children ran away from school and scattered among the dirt courtyards, throughout the village: four walls of lots, a row of hanged men's gallows, a few washers with two yards of black mud around them, and a little more light that inside the school.

Lello was left alone with the teacher, because that day it was his turn to do the cleaning: this happened several times during the week, because the teacher chose at random, without punishing or rewarding, but according to his own mind. In any case, it was a matter of staying there for not even half an hour longer, giving the desks a quick sweep of the broom, and dusting the teacher's desk and the paintings a little. Lello hurriedly did what he had to do, because by now he was used to it: and when he had finished, he just ran down towards the house.

He had a bit of trouble walking through the meadows in the dark or almost so, and he made his way at a run, with his hair jumping in front of his eyes, also black, and shining like two mussels, and the American flowered T-shirt that she spanked him over his trousers. The burini had already stopped working in the gardens around there, and Via delle Messi d'Oro, with the cherry trees and the almond trees in their first bud, was completely empty, while from behind the farmhouses you could hear the voices of young men singing as they Claudio Villa, and, even further away, the trumpets of the Fort sounding the free exit.

Under the pylon of the aqueduct bridge, there was Tommasino. He still hadn't gone home, and he was there waiting with his bag over his shoulder.

«To Tomà, well?» Lello asked, passing ahead of him and climbing first up the iron ladder along the pylon.

Tommasino followed him without saying anything, with a round, lenticular face that always seemed to be stained with grease.

Lello walked along the bridge as if he were the boss, without even turning to look at the slave who trotted after him.

«What, are you worried about Lè?» said Tommaso, behind, with a mischievous face. «Damn them!»

But Lello was already busy going down the other pylon: he jumped onto the clover and started running along the path in the middle of the reeds. Tommaso ran after him, all strapped in, out of breath.

«Wait for me, fuck...!» she shouted at him.

But the other, without thinking about it at all, ran away; and only when Tommaso was well detached did he begin to go more slowly and walk playing among the reeds and willow branches. Then as soon as Tommaso got back to him again, he started running again, down the slopes of the fields, which rose upwards with the rows of broccoli already sprouted, among a few small trees.

He detached it once more, and once again, on the plateau, he went back to the pace. But this time he forced him to let himself be picked up by Tommasino, who was sweating like a fountain: and they went down the humps in pairs, towards the pile of hovels down there where they lived, on the road between Pietralata and Montesacro, just before the point where the sewer of the Polyclinic it flows into the Aniene.

In the village of shacks some lights were already on, reflecting on the mud. The other kids were playing at the door of the house, while inside, in those little rooms where ten or eleven of them lived, you could hear the screams of women arguing and creatures whining.

As soon as they saw Lello and Tommasino, their companions stopped playing and went to meet them.

“You tycoon, what?” Zucabbo made him all red and disheveled.

«But which one did you tycoon, which one did you tycoon!» Lello shouted at him.

«And go away!» Tommasino also asked him gravely, «but yes, we're coming to school now! What, are you one-eyed?»

«Aòh, hurry up», said Zucabbo without speaking, «we'll go away, you know!»

«And years!» said Tommasino acidly, «why, don't we know how to get there? What, are you taking us to cavacecio, are you taking us? Look at these!»

«Aòh, we don't care about you..., you know!» he did it again by immediately taking Zucabbo down. «If you want to hurry, hurry, otherwise we'll spend!» And he forcefully struck three or four blows with his left hand against the palm of his right hand pointed like a knife towards Montesacro.

In the meantime, Lello had run forward, entered the shack where he lived, and not even a minute later had emerged with a loaf of peppers in his hand. He nodded to the other males, and said, "Namo!" with his mouth stuffed shut.

Tommasino, seeing Lello, also ran into his shack. But his mother still hadn't prepared dinner for him. He almost burst into tears of anger: but he didn't even waste time protesting. He immediately resurrected himself outside, and ventured out with the others, who had already set off, with an empty stomach.

The road that led to Montesacro, with the asphalt reduced to a few pizzas on the gravel dust and strewn with dirt and waste, went behind the Aniene.

The river flowed under some smelly embankments, especially at the point where there was the outlet of the sewer of the Polyclinic; on the other side other escarpments rose, where you could see houses and cottages, some construction sites, other villages of hovels. Beyond the Aniene, the fields stretched towards the hills of Tivoli, confused in the cold air.

The construction sites and buildings, after a few curves, began to thicken: they appeared in front of us almost everywhere, on the mounds, against the sky, or down, in the ditches, among the remains of the vegetable gardens and meadows, against the river drainage.

Beyond that circle of scaffolding and earthworks, the crumbled road led to the Nomentana, just above the Battery, and just before the new bridge over the Aniene. Down there, right at the intersection of the two roads, there was a clearing full of pine trees, where there were carousels, with lots of light and few people, who went back and forth, especially around the table football tent.

«What if we play a game in Lè?» Zucabbo shouted as they came into sight of the tent, all packed with kids.

Lello nodded his head, starting to run towards the gaming tables, which were all already occupied.

Two against two the boys soaked it at breakneck speed, with their legs wide apart, all sweaty and crazy, while those who were looking around, leaning against the fence, with a bored and ironic look, had to turn up the collar of their jackets and remain huddled with hands in pockets, because the coolness of the March evening was no joke.

Tommaso and his friends came to stand in the middle of the already large crowd of customers, who were impatiently waiting for some tables to hurry up. And, in the meantime, just so as not to miss the exercise, they shouted paraguli: «Come on, to Veleno!», «Come on, to Trerè, let's see who

you are!», phoning more bored than anything else, with their mouths speaking for the 'habit.

Some, like Tommaso and his companions, were the children of poor people who lived around there, in the shacks on the Aniene: but the majority were young gentlemen, students, who lived in Montesacro or in the new skyscrapers of the Batteria Nomentana. As soon as a table was vacated by the four players, Lello, Tommasino, Zucabbo, Sergio and Carletto, they threw themselves into it with arrogance, rubbing their dirty bellies against the edge, and occupying the table, without even listening to the protests of the four or five subjects who had been waiting there before them.

«Aòh, it's our turn, it's about time we were here!» a student said vibrantly, sticking his chest out. The four from Little Shanghai didn't even look at him, looking at him with eyes like the boss, a starving man like them, thin as an alicione, who without saying a word, reached out, took the money and opened the pallet door.

Only Tommasino, with a tired look, said to the student: «And trot! And datte!», preparing to play.

But the other four, as if they had agreed, were already at it, Lello and Carletto against Zucabbo and Sergio. Tommasino came forward with his bacon against the edge of the table too, and his eyes glistening with anger between the lenses of his greasy face: «Well», he turned black, with a threatening expression towards the others, «but I can't do it ?" »

«And go away!» Lello said impatiently and hastily.

«No, no, here we have to come to an agreement, you know!» Tommaso said with profound conviction.

«And get off the...!» Zucabbo shouted, pushing him against his side and moving him from the edge of the table football table.

«Look at these!» Tommasino shouted in disgust, full of tears and anger, immediately looking for a fight. But the others had already started playing, without even looking at him anymore.

He then stood there on the sidelines, his eyes crooked, still chattering to himself, vomiting. «'These wretches, assholes! Who do they believe they are! » Then little by little he soaked them up, standing there looking critically at the game, full of contempt.

«But whoever has learned it, let's play!» he shouted ironically, as one of his companions made a smooth play.

The others didn't even listen to him, without giving him a cent of importance, all busy giving some balls-breaking sleppe.

«See this! Kill that broccoli!» Tommasino shouted to a blind man from Carletto. «I'm an asshole from Lazio!" And he burst out laughing, with his mouth wide open, as loudly as he could, so that everyone around could hear him.

“Huàh, huàh, huàh,” he would say, pressing his belly with his hands stuck in the pockets of his shorts, and writhing like a bruised lump.

«You disgust ar ca...!» he then said to her, as he had calmed down a little, with an increasingly disgusted grin.

«Give it to me, go ahead, it's better! Whoever does it to me is going to see these four bastards here!" And starting to laugh loudly again, out of spite, he went out from under the table football tent and went around the carousels.

There were a few people in the illuminated spaces, young men with scooters, soldiers, and especially sailors. They walked around in small groups, with an idle and threatening air, some humming and some acting like a slut with the girls at the dartboards. Tommasino wandered around the pine forest like them, stopping to watch the cars on the almost empty runways and the airplanes with two or three customers on them, huddled on the seats and white-faced from the giannetta.

So, little by little, we reached the end, where the pine forest ended, right under the bridge over the Aniene, and the escarpment began, all full of rubbish landslides.

There he began to observe the movement. On the bridge, high up, under a sort of white column that looked like that of a tomb, there were two sluts: all annoyed, one with a red overcoat, and one with a black knit sweater, grumpy and disheveled. They were both stocky, with bellies that looked like they were pregnant, short and thick hips, two black and hairy faces with low monkey foreheads and a bag in their hands.

They just stood there, or took a few steps back and forth. Meanwhile, from the carousels, four or five sailors, disbanded, are climbing among the pines. They climbed up the little road of the escarpment and arrived next to the lace scaffolding of the bridge. They chatted for a while, with those who responded badly, as mean as two protested bills of exchange, and they who enjoyed seeing them annoyed and pretending not to need their money.

Then at the end they compared, and began to go back down the slope: the two whores and two sailors, the others remained up there on the deck, smoking, waiting their turn. The two sailors had already arrived all nimbly in the clearing of the pine forest, and the two sluts had only taken a few steps: they came down doggy style, on all fours, looking askance down with a disdainful face and propping themselves up on the slippery slope one after the other's feet leaping out of the shoe like timbales. Finally they too were at the bottom, and with their bags clutched in their hands, and with the two sailors, passing in front of Tommasino, they went towards the other, lower cliff, which descended full of bushes onto the Aniene.

Tommasino, as soon as they disappeared into the darkness, followed them to spy on where they were going: whether there in the middle of the thickets, already full of papers, rubbish and jars, or in the even dirtier little cave, under the old bridge over the river.

After following them and seeing that they were headed precisely for this little cave, whistling and laughing loudly on his behalf, he ran back, slipped between a carousel and the bumper cars, arrived in the small, fully lit square in the center of the carosielli, but he no longer found the members, neither at the table football table nor hanging around there. Who knows where they had gone. «Damn them about these artichokes!» he thought angrily. And he began to go back down only towards the thickets of the Aniene, slowly and stopping here and there. So as he slowly left, he found Lello leaning against the fence of the bumper cars, looking at the only two cars that were going around, with two couples of sailors on them.

Tommasino, very satisfied, approached him from behind, on tiptoe, and covered his eyes with his hands. The other guy got really pissed off and gave him a hard blow backwards that almost made him go wide in the middle of the track. Tommasino burst out laughing. But the other one was still looking at him enraged and mumbling: "He's the damn thing...!" «Aòh», said Tommasino, «do you know that there are sluts?» He was silent for a moment, then continued: "Let's go and see, in Lè?"

Lello shrugged. Tommasino suddenly let out another forced laugh. "I'm going, you know," he said, rubbing his belly against the fence and stretching. "They're with the sailors," he added, his eyes shining. He held onto the edges of the fence with his hands, and dangled with his body outward, jerking.

Then suddenly he let himself go, jumping backwards onto the road, and set off towards the river, looking sideways at Lello, and jerking his head at him to signal him to come after him.

When he was about fifteen meters ahead, already almost under the pines, Lello took a run and without saying anything caught him again. Having become very excited and serious, Tommasino led the way towards the first dried rubbish, and they entered the middle of the paths which branched off from them down the embankment full of rubbish and rubbish. They walked around a little in the middle, and arrived at the foot of the little cave. The two whores with the sailors had remained there right at the entrance, because inside there were at least two palms of shit, and with that little bit of moonlight that reached us, they could be seen standing, the whores against the very disfigured wall, and the two sailors on top of them, writhing like two lizards caught in an attack on their backs.

Tommasino and Lello sat down where they were under a bush, looking at the two couples through the torn branches. Tommasino placed himself in fourth position, stretching his legs on those four hairs of dirty grass.

«Come on Lè!» she said after a while, looking at the other, with the air of someone who can't resist. Lello, on his knees, did as he did. «Of course you don't have much of it, you want it!» Tommasino asked. "If it's! I don't want it!" Lello replied. "What, didn't you even do this at school today?" «And go away», said the other impatiently, «you've already bored me!»

«Come on, what have you done», insisted Tommasino, mangy, trying to look mocking. «Could you unmold what?» said Lello. Tommasino rolled on the weeds choking on laughter. «What do I care!» he said, so loudly that the two couples in the cave looked around in shock. Then he calmed down and started work again next to Lello, who was all huddled up, with his quiff dancing over his eyes. «But, for real», Tommasino continued after a while, «I would also like to try them again!» He said it with an indifferent air, of someone who wants to get satisfaction, but negligible, nothing. «Yes, tomorrow I'll give you a shower», he added, «what can you do with me?»

«And what do I have to do with a lump?» Lello said contemptuously.

"Two!" said Tommasino, "are you okay?"

The next morning Tommasino got up at six, while it was still dark, a little rainy and a little windy. With the light the sun came, then it rained again, then the sun returned.

Around midday, Pietralata was completely soaked and glistening. On the old dry mud of the esplanade there was a crust of new mud, made of chocolate, where the males tumbled like little pigs playing football.

Tommasino was holding in one hand the empty sack where he had placed the old iron, the other hand he kept in his pocket, where the two pieces of rubbish he had made while using iron were lying in ruins, among the piles of rubbish along the Tiburtina embankments.

"Boy," he shouted to one, mouth wide and legs wide, "I'll play too, if you don't mind."

«None, none!» the kids screamed. «We are right!»

«What the hell is yours», shouted Tommaso, «who are just, who are just, but what is that? What, are you in Rome?»

«And go away, he's not a bother...!» one of the little guys shouted in a voice like a broken gramophone.

In response, Tommasino moved with slow, shuffling steps towards one of the two doors, threw the sack onto one of the lumps of gravel that served as a pole, and pulled himself into the middle of the clearing among the pile of kids.

One who looked like an apple came towards him half crying, shouting at him that his throat was bursting: «Are you leaving? A wretch! »

But just as the ball was coming that way, Tommasino gave the little dick a hard blow, making it fall with its butt on the mud, and laughing loudly, all red in the face, he started running after the ball with those two crooked legs that looked like those of a dachshund dog.

«And he came in!» she then shouted, with her hands like a funnel around her mouth, a linnet who was lazing, with two or three other companions, at the edge of the pitch. He stood there wildly, with the others, in a little shade, against the crumbling parade of a vegetable garden full of dirty papers and pieces of urinal.

Tommasino pretended not to have heard the shouting.

«To Piedizozzi!» he shouted the other, standing up, and calling him by the name given to his bigger brother, also a slow redhead, who always smelled like a marana. «What, do you feel like any of them?»

Tommasino continued to run throwing the poles here and there onto the mud, with two boats tied with cords and strings at his feet, without yet thinking at all about what was coming to attack him head on.

The other immediately began to enjoy it. Rising to his feet, his face had become completely bruised, and a blissful smile had settled in his narrowed eyes, fixed forward, as if congealed by the enjoyment of his profound spiritual well-being. He stuck his hands in the pockets of his trousers that were in his trousers, and under his shirt you could see his bellicose, and he came further forward on the edge of the field, running his tongue over his lips.

«To Piedizozzi», he began again, «but can't you see that it's your turn to walk with wide legs? But can't you see that you're losing like the ducks?"

This time Tommasino, already running all sweaty with a hand of tomato sauce on his face, turned around and giggled with watery eyes and a small wrinkle that cut his forehead in half: "A Zimmì", he shouted, "and let me lose, no ? Can't you see that I'm Pandorfini, right?" And he threw himself headlong back into the ball into the scrum of kids.

«If, if, you scream like that!» she did the other, mumbling, her face increasingly illuminated by everything he was and felt he was. «Laugh, laugh, my mother made gnocchi!» «You see», he added almost slowly, inspired, «I'm equal to adverting the Pipì! »

«To the wretch!» Tommaso shouted, already more resentful, with his big head floating among the chickens that were running in a crowd after the ball. His eyes were almost crying, while his flat mouth stretched into a venomous laugh, revealing his row of brown teeth.

Another one had been added to the first malandro. He was a god of twenty-five-odd years old, still with curls on his neck and a rascally shawl, with the yellow face of a hungry fox. Both of them stood side by side at the door.

They held their foreheads, their mouths, their butts, the crotches of their trousers turned out, with their hands in their pockets. «Kill you», shouted the one who could have been the father of a family, with the air of a fool at the first shots, «what, do you still have the courage to speak? With those ten years of debt you're carrying with you?"

"Self! Ten years!" Tommasino shouted mockingly, his face burning with anger, almost tearing up, "but yes, I don't even have thirteen!"

«Well, what do you say, please», said Zimmì, ferociously, but with the air of speaking too loudly, and therefore letting himself laugh, «that, at the age of two, you wouldn't have caught him, perhaps, at Little Shanghai? From the Dirty Feet Tribe?"

«Bring me sister!» Tommaso shouted jokingly, his voice coming out of his nose.

The big man became benevolent, hypocritically sharpening his big nose and his cuck against his shawl: "What, didn't you know, in Zimmì?" he said. «He, trust some deaf people! Look'! From tomorrow my sister won't leave the house anymore! I buy 'and fero underwear'!

"But how?" shouted Zimmì, caressingly, "but then they told me 'na bucià' that it was your mother who learned to whistle?"

«Lassa loses my mother», Tommaso snapped, taking a few steps towards the two, «whatever!»

"What, what do you want?" said the younger one, with a look that would have made a Chinese stink, "what, are you Tinea?"

But then another gang of scoundrels passed by in the distance. «To Shit!» one of them shouted to the biggest one, in a voice that was barely audible, "What are you doing, losing sleep, Ila? You come among Christians, don't you?"

"What the hell," Shitter shouted happily, "can't you see we're working?"

«What, are you in Rome?» shouted Zimmì, instantly forgetting about Piedizozzi.

"We're going to fix the grain!" shouted one of those far away.

«Shall we get angry too, in Cagò?» Zimmì said to his friend. «Let's go!» he did this.

«Aòh, waiteeee!» Zimmì shouted at the top of his lungs to the gang that was descending one by one between the lots.

«We are terrified of Pietralata!» one of them shouted cheerfully. "Heaps!" another shouted. "Them Californians!"

«The car, the car!» said Zimmì, who with Shitter in tow, had moved with the walk of a tired man towards his companions. He began to run like a cripple, with the other in his heels, towards the 211 stop which came from Montesacro full of starving people and soldiers from the Fort. The others also ran, whistling, like a troop of jackals.

The midday sirens sounded breathlessly here and there.

Tommasino, already all sweaty, was running around the pitch, among the little ones who reached him under his beard, red and unkempt. They threw themselves with their heads down, tongues hanging out and hair that hadn't been shorn for a year over their eyes, at the ball, either all on the attack or all on the defense.

Tommasino sailed over those little peaks encrusted with dry dust, and he always had the ball between his feet, or almost always: but the more he had it, the more he became angry at keeping it there, dribbling and kicking his shins: and sometimes he even kicked peas backwards, catching them by the rags. They got angry and screamed. But Tommasino didn't think about them at all, and he continued to play acting like a bastard, and laughing loudly, satisfied as he was, both for the business that had gone straight in the morning and for the niceties that he was doing. «I know the power, I know!» he shouted, opening wide his little lipless mouth with its four little brown teeth chipped away.

Until one, as small as a puppy, still nursing, grabbed him from the chest and shouted: "Ah-head...!" Tommasino stopped the run, dropping the ball. He lowered his mouth, nauseated, turning even redder in the face, and asked the little dick: "What did you say?"

The man, bundled up in a pair of trousers without a button and in a sweater with more holes than a sieve, remained still where he was, getting all swollen and his eyes blurry.

«Fuck...!» he slurred quite loudly, «fuck-head...!»

«Affan.. you're going, do you understand?» Tommasino said threateningly, with his neck cords pulled, approaching. And perhaps if he had only said that, the little guy would have been there, and he would have taken off after the ball, but Tommasino instead repeated to him: "He understood, yes?" and he poked him under the nose. And then, turning all red and pulling at his skin which was bursting, as if someone from behind was inflating him with a pump, he burst out shouting: «A wretch, a thief, a broke man...! But who called you here! Go away, go away, you damn me!"

Without saying anything, with a white face, Tommasino gave him a slap that made him turn his head away.

Then, she told him, with two owl's eyes: "Be careful, I'll give you a slap and I'll take you off, you know!" The other only realized after a while that he had received a slap and that his head was turned that way. And as soon as he realized it, he started screaming his guts out.

He was crying still, leaning forward, with his mouth open, scattering tears all around as if they were tiny specks.

Tommasino, out of anger that he was crying so hard, put a finger to his nose, grimly, and shouted at him: "Now if you don't stop, I'll give you the rest." And since the little guy wouldn't stop, taken by a fit of rage, he

soaked him two more lactates, and on top of that he gave him a shove that sent him down, and as soon as he was on the ground, with his little body long on the mud and his little legs in the air, he approached him and gave him two or three kicks in the ribs.

The little guy, rolling in the mud, started screaming as if he were being stripped: then he stood up, and straight ahead, without looking back, sped off towards the house.

«Now call up brother, I know... yours, now!» said another little guy, who, with the others, had hypocritically witnessed the scene. Tommasino, taking a mischievous walk and mumbling other threatening words with full importance, went towards the door, picked up his bag and, pretending not to be in any hurry, cut down the clearing, towards the bus stop. car.

With his eyes still glassy with righteous anger, he threw disdainful and offended looks around, but squinted in the direction of the subject's lousy house, to see if his big brother didn't come out in good need. When he was out of danger, at the height of his sister Anita's stall, he also began to sing, slouching as he walked, and still occasionally casting a sideways glance back, with one eye that said: «Taja, who are you going here for? cuckold, you know!» and the other: «I know the power! Pandorfini isn't anyone I like!», while his wide mouth, with the row of brown teeth, sang: "What apples, what apples..." croaking among the four cherry trees in the dirty little gardens towards the Aniene.

A thick cloud had meanwhile spread across the sky, starting from behind the river, after the houses of Montesacro, far, far away. It had covered all the light that previously filled the sky still wet with rain, and now reflected it on the lousy fields.

Tommasino, who had not heard the sirens go off shortly before, thought that it was late, and that the evening was beginning.

He started running, splashing the mud under the already plastered rubble, down the little streets half buried between the vegetable gardens and the embankments, crossed the aqueduct bridge, trotted across the mounds all soaked and beautiful green, and arrived at Little Shanghai. . «By now they will have already left, damn them!» he thought angrily, going down between the hovels, across the small flooded space in the middle.

He went straight to Lello's house. There was no one. Only the old exhausted black dog, who couldn't even find the strength to bark, fast as he was, and contented himself with getting up, looking around and moving

from under the little rickety door, made of slats so old they smelled, to a small rusty parade, and there he lay down on the mud, mixed with piss and the remains of the soups.

«You dirty d...!» he made Tommaso black again. He swerved, and went back up towards his house, a little higher.

«A ma'», he said, entering and throwing the sack, «are you ready to eat?»

But the pile was still boiling on the stove. The mother was over there, in the other room: another room so to speak, because it was all a hovel, separated only by a gray and rotting curtain and a small cardboard wall over a framework of pieces of boards of all sorts , badly nailed.

Tommasino knelt down and rummaged under a chest, which, with a small cupboard that was falling to pieces, the stove and two chairs, was all that was in the little room, and it barely fit: from this chest he took out some battered newspapers and he began to read.

Inside the house there were also the other two boys, Tito and Toto, Tommaso's younger brothers, who, as soon as he entered, had slipped away in silence.

Seeing that he was reading, one came on all fours next to him, and started looking at him from bottom to top, remaining fixed there, with his little swollen face where the snot, draining, had worked the zella in many spots, blurred in the center, black at the selvages. The little blue eyes, almost white, looked like those of a blind man, under the little curls they were also covered in dust and snot.

Looking straight up, on all fours, he began to make a grumbling sound, a noise that came out of his belly and barely rubbed his throat: he laughed. Seeing that Tommasino wasn't listening to him, he approached him a little further and placed his head on his knee, with his beard on his thigh. Tommaso, annoyed, gave a tap up with his knee, and the other did a deer on the floor, against the box, banging the cucuzza.

He almost cried there, on his stomach as he was, but at that moment his attention was drawn to a small piece of bread that had fallen under the cupboard that morning. He turned the bacon downwards and, after two or three tries, managed to grab the morsel of bread, and began sucking it again.

The other little guy, Toto, in the meantime, had been playing with the bowl full of water placed in the middle of the room, collecting the raindrops

that filtered from the ceiling, between two pieces of tarred canvas: then he 'he started to jump here and there in spurts, who knows why, like little dogs do when they see a fly flying around their nose.

Tommasino, as soon as he was ready, quickly ate four spoonfuls of soup, took his bread with some vegetables inside and chewed it away.

Out there, Zucabbo and Sergetto were playing with the knife on a slightly drier edge of the clearing.

«What, have you seen Lello, in Serge?» Tommaso asked as kindly as he could.

"None," he replied dryly, without even looking at Sergetto: at that moment Zucabbo had made a mistake and Sergetto threw himself on the knife.

«I'm going to school, you know!» Tommaso shouted at the naughty girl.

«And go!» Zucabbo muttered between his teeth, "what the... are you waiting for?"

Tommaso began to sing boldly, and clutching the two plates in his pocket, he walked all the way back to Pietralata.

Lello's mother was Sora Anita, the one who was selling bruscolini and sweets next to the car stop. Tommasino arrived there and went straight to her.

«Have you seen your son, sir?» he asked her.

«I went into Rome to buy me some liquorice, come back now», she said.

Tommasino then crouched there next to the stall, at his sister Anita's feet, on a remnant of the pavement. It seemed to be already evening, and it was cold: in that cold, dark air, against Pietralata, the stall seemed even smaller, on its tripod, with a tent on top for when it rained: there were many gnawed, moldy cardboard boxes , where Tommaso slurped, swallowing spit, in one a handful of goliath sweets, in another the bruscolini, in another a bit of powdery liquorice; in a bag hanging from a corner, four fusajas. Sister Anita was sitting there on a little seat, supervising her goods, bemused, and so big that she couldn't keep her legs together.

After half an hour Lello arrived with a package full of lollipops. He stood there and argued with her mother for a while, gave her the rest of her, and argued with her because he wanted to keep half a barrel. He prevailed, and without even looking at Tommasino, just as he hadn't looked at him when he arrived, he said no.

Tommasino stood up, looking bored, half stretching, and took it back.

«To Le'», he said. Lello turned sideways, with his black arabesque grunt, and with his American flowered shirt flapping on his narrow hips and his torn shorts.

"What do you want?" she said.

«Then we agree...» said the bad Tommaso.

Lello tightened his fingers and moved them a little uncertainly and questioningly in front of Tommaso's eyes.

«I got the two piots», said Tommasino allusively.

«Aaaah», said Lello, remembering, and, loosening the pile of fingers, scratched himself thoughtfully in his shorts, in bell.

«Tieh!» Tommaso said, handing them to him.

Lello didn't take them immediately: he raised his hand halfway and looked bitterly and contemptuously at the two pieces that Tommaso gave him.

"That? Will you give me some rain?" he said, disgusted and almost pissed off, and what do you have with two idiots?"

«Damn», said Tommasino, «what would it be like today? What, we didn't agree like that?"

«Aòh», said Lello, «what do I have for you today? If it increases, if not, nothing will happen."

He looked deep into Tommasino's eyes for a moment, moving his straight thumb and forefinger like an auger, then started walking towards school again.

«I have another half a pot», said Tommasino, «aòh but you'll make me smoke too, right?»

Lello was silent. Tommasino turned black: he took out the other half-bowl he was holding, and handed it to Lello: «Here, fuck...!» he told him.

Lello quickly grabbed the two and a half pounds and made them disappear into the pockets of his shorts, frowning and condensing his gaze boredly, to hide his satisfaction.

It was almost time to go to school now: a bit of sun had risen again to make the mud of Pietralata shine, and the kids were standing here and there, waiting. Then the bell rang, and everyone came in, jostling and cheering. The village remained half empty, in silence, under the sun.

As school ended, and everyone came back out, making even more noise than when they entered, Tommaso remained alone in the small classroom

on the ground floor.

Dozens of girls from the slut, since the village had been founded, had written down their names and those of their companions on the desks, with live or down in front and a bunch of other backgrounds, so that there wasn't a word left. 'healthy wooden shell.

Tommasino immediately started dusting those desks with a rag, little by little, and in five minutes he had done no more than two, turning the rag over and over at random, and stopping to rub inch by inch that mess of holes and of signs full of zella. What he was interested in was beating the maestro: that's why he was there, and he had worked so hard with Lello. He watched himself cooking it, his snout white from the cold that was in the little room, between the bare and disfigured walls, and two small windows from which the dying light entered.

Then since the teacher didn't even notice him, he actually stopped dusting, so that at least the teacher, seeing that he was doing nothing, would give him a run for his money.

But instead he was hunched over the desk, writing on the script, with his head smeared with brilliantine, and four or five hairs that stood straight up like razor clams behind him, where the writing ended.

As he had slowly done the first two desks, Tommasino rested and sat on the third desk playing with the rag and banging the ink bottle into the hole.

He cleaned like this, lying on the seat. The teacher continued to write in the register as if nothing had happened. Tommasino dropped the rag on the seat, and slowly, slowly, he rubbed the backrest until he completely stretched out his legs and stood stretched out, with his head sunk between his shoulders, and with his hands between his thighs, which, in that position, shuffling on the seat, had half slipped out of those ragged shorts that looked like a skirt.

In that position, Tommasino looked up at the teacher, as if waiting for something to say now. But that's quiet. «Fuck...!» Tommasino thought, his frozen face becoming increasingly sharper with anger.

He stayed that way for a while longer, pushing the teacher and spreading his legs wider and wider, one under the counter and the other against the lid, changing his expression of anger into a bored and almost cheerful grimace. “Dude,” she continued, almost in a loud voice, “what, are you asleep?”

He took his rag again and gave it a blow and ran away on the remaining benches along the wall with the windows. She almost ran the other two rows. She then went outside to get the broom and started sweeping randomly here and there.

While he was fucking, whistling softly and making grimaces with his mouth, he noticed that the master had raised his eyes towards him for a moment.

Then he stopped fucking, and got under the desk, standing there still and waiting for the teacher to look at him. When he looked up again, Tommasino asked him: "What, can Anna do with the cabinet?" «Go», the teacher said between his teeth, as if thinking: «What do I have for you today? Do what you think, come and ask me, come and ask me?"

But Tommaso, on the other hand, didn't go to the toilet at all, and didn't even pick up the broom again, which he had placed against the wall: he went to put it back on a bench and began to work on his clothes again.

There was a worn-out t-shirt, the sleeves of which his mother had had to cut off because they had turned into rags, not even suitable for the rag-picker: so, underneath, he had another shirt, which, however, still had quite good sleeves. , while everything else that couldn't be seen was ragged. But Tommasino felt it, though. And with the excuse of huddling up that bale of rags, he loosened the string that held up his trousers, and, passing one hand against his belly, he pulled down the lumps that had piled up on his waist as he moved: with the other hand he kept his trousers and string up.

The teacher raised his head, serious, with a shadowy air, then asked, so softly that you could almost not hear him: "What's the matter with Lello's mother?" "I don't know, if he feels bad," said Tommasino, continuing to adjust his trousers over his leg. The teacher fell silent and lowered his head back onto the desk. It was almost dark by now: but the little bit of light that entered through the windows and filled the room was blinding in the frozen air.

Tommaso always stood there, still, on the bench, with a half-sly, half-lost face, embittered.

«What are you waiting for, you asshole», he thought, «what, am I stupid? What, am I worse than Lello? Aòh, be careful that in here I'll cook them all, you know! What do you think, that I don't know what to do? But I understood you before anyone else, dammit! And to Lello, I told you,

before you even started, what an asshole! But you can't see it's a sheave, it is! Me, I know, me, not that!"

While Tommaso was thinking like this, getting more and more grumpy, the master passed the sorbent paper over the cup, closed it and stood up. "Come on," he said, "it's time."

Stretching a little awkwardly, he took his duster attached to a coat hanger behind the teacher's desk, and put it on. Tommasino looked at him full of amazement and bile: «But what would it be, all this rush tonight, damn you!» he thought.

But the teacher nodded to him again, very seriously, and after having closed the register in the drawer, he moved towards the door.

Tommasino ran to put the broom butt and the rag in a corner of the shed, and caught up with the teacher as he left and went down among the lots and pieces of beaten earth, with the asphalt pizzas.

«Hello, Puzzilli!» said the teacher, half-breathed, still serious, and, smaller and lighter than his kids, I extended the crank towards the car stop.

«Good evening, a sor maè», said Tommasino, staying at a distance, and adding again between his teeth: «You damn it!»

He kept chasing him from the end of the street, but he still couldn't rest, and he followed him, all the way to Sister Anita's banquet.

"You're not messing with me, huh?" he thought dazedly. «You're afraid! A faggot! But what will you find in Lello, that starving asshole, who doesn't even have a father, doesn't have one, isn't anyone's son! But he's with me, I'm a good boy, not a louse like that! Fuck it!"

He crouched down on the edge of the sidewalk next to his sister Anita, and stood there chasing the teacher for the entire time he waited for 211, with his eyes fixed, as if an idea was coming to him and he was thinking about it, black.

211 arrived, and the teacher queued up to get him: Tommaso looked at him. As soon as he got in and the car started moving, all of a sudden he stood up: «Oh yes, huh? Do you do this?" he thought. «You're good! But now I'll show you, your damn thing! I'll make it small for you! I know... yours, now! Not even Jesus Christ can take away ten years of prison from you!

No sooner said than done, without saying goodbye to Lello's mother at all, he set off in the same direction as the car, towards Tiburtina, at a run.

Lello, in the meantime, with two or three other little spiders, had gone wandering around the village. They had been playing nice in all those places, spitting the butts they had picked up on the street: then they had set out on the warpath, and gone up Monte del Pecoraro, to make focaracci with piles of plantains, along the mangy slope. They ran back down, and the first one to get down began to loudly call the others: "Come, come!" Down under the mountain, in search of the church, there was something, a lady, with a car as big as a building: she was all full of stuff, to be distributed to the poor. They stood around her, making a fuss, to get something: «Me, me! a sign! to me!"

The driver gave him two or three packs of powdered milk. They began to tear the packages and gorge themselves on powder, in handfuls, which they were about to choke on.

Then they ran to the fountain, to drink and to dissolve the powder in their mouths: but they were already fed up, and had begun to blow it on themselves, and throw it down the back of their necks. They had arrived near the cinema, white as helmets: there they had begun to patrol, trying to sneak in.

Thus, from the door of the Lux, Lello saw Tommaso coming forward running. He didn't look anyone in the face, already exhausted, with his shorts dancing in tatters on his legs and with his shriveled arms hanging limply against his sides.

Lello narrowed his eyes, immediately noticing the snort, and took a few steps onto the road to look at Tommaso better.

«But what the... is this son of a slut?» he muttered in concentration.

In any case, after thinking about it for a bit, he followed suit. He ran after him all along Via di Pietralata, from the Lux cinema to the Forte sulla Tiburtina. There was no danger that Tommaso would turn back: he ran away straight and bent over, looking as if he had just slipped, as if they had done the Saint Anthony on him.

Then, since it was now time for everyone to go out, and there was a confusion of Bersaglieri at the corner of the bar, in order not to lose sight of him, they had to make a gallop: and he barely had time to see him, which turned downwards, towards Tiburtino Terzo, still at a trot.

«But where the... goes?» Lello repeated to himself, more and more shadowed, passing on the other side of the road, against the embankment.

Tommasino, on the other hand, ran on the raised pavement, above Monte del Pecoraro: having reached the end of this, at the point of the Tiburtino square, he stood still for a moment to look around, then, cutting through the rush of engines, he crossed the road.

Lello stuck himself against the wall, hiding himself in the brush and mud; then he started running again, to get to the Tiburtino square in time, before the other disappeared.

He hid himself again behind an old broken tower, which in the upper part acted as an electrical substation and a family lived underneath: from behind it you could see the whole square, with the street lamps already lit. Right in front there was a small group of houses, with the Bar Duemila, and, behind, the innermost part of the square, which was all closed off like a courtyard.

Tommasino had headed straight there: in the middle of a small group of pine trees, at the end, there was a building with many square columns in front: an old fascist gym, half in disrepair, which now served as a barracks.

Lello turned white with anger, with the nock trembling on his forehead. «Spy!» he breathed, pointing at him with his almost crying eye.

In fact, Tommasino climbed the two steps in front of the gym, went under the brown colonnade, and presented himself, as small as a pile of rags, in front of a carabinieri, who was standing armed next to the door.

2. NIGHT IN THE CITY OF GOD

«What, did you see Lello, in A'?» Tommasino asked a certain Aldo who was passing by him. «And who's there?» he did this with a gesture of such disgust that he felt like spitting. Then he regretted having acted a little too rudely and added: "He'll be lying." «Thanks ar ca...!» said Tommasino, and went up his street: it was the street of the school and the Communist Party hall, where they danced on Sundays. And in fact the sidewalks, if those two tracks of mud and gravel on the sides of the road could be called that, were all full of young men in suits and soldiers from the Fort. It was winter, December: but it was hot and sweaty, and the fog that covered Pietralata and the fields around the Aniene looked like the steam of a bath. Tommasino was walking in the middle of the street, with his hands inside the little pockets, at elbow level, of his leather jacket: one slice after another, as if they were hurting him, bent forward a little and all slouched.

«What, did you see Lello in Cazziti?» he joined us again with another, who was chatting dressed as if it were August, and with the humidity making his curls fall down to the creases of his nose. «None», he said abruptly, but Tommasino didn't even listen to him, because he was asking that question like that, just to ask it, to raise some dust: he knew that that little bitch Lello was up for the dance .

The room was in a small one-story house, painted pink, with three small windows in a row, and a door onto a small courtyard along the street. A little house like all the ones around there, placed in rows of ten or twelve, all the same, with their dirty little courtyards in front. They were the houses of the evicted, lined up there in the middle of the expanse of lots. Here and there there were some crooked little trees, without ever a leaf, and some latrines of planks.

The door and windows were open: and the light reflected on the courtyard. Inside and outside there was a confusion of kids, youngsters, young girls and drunken old men who seemed to be in the square.

«The hell with you, in Le'!» Tommaso shouted at the top of his lungs and his face evil as he entered and saw Lello pressed against a piece of wall with holes like a sieve. "Soak me!" Lello replied to him, and he immediately left him there, like a standstill, because the orchestra, made up of three linnets and an elderly man who looked like Cacini, had started a samba: and Lello had thrown himself full force through the whole crowd,

and he had presented himself first, without bowing or asking anything, in front of a joker dressed in black velvet. After an instant he was there dancing the samba, swinging the line now to the right, now to the left like a woodpecker with a pistol. While it was spinning, Lello, muttering American rubber, threw back one after the other, with a tap of his buttocks, his calves wrapped tightly by American trousers and his feet with pointed shoes and buckles.

The band seemed to be piece work, and especially the little boy who played the harmonica, black like a Moroccan, and with a row of teeth, bared like those of a cat's carcass, which shone merrily.

Behind a partition, just over a meter high, there was the tavern, that is, a barrel, a table and a werewolf who served, already drunk as a cucuzza.

In front of the table there was Shitter, with Buddha, Nazzareno and two or three other shoemakers: no longer a beginner, about twenty-four or twenty-five years old.

«Aòh», said Tommaso, to Shitter, «when will that one move? The year of the ca...!»

Shitter didn't answer him: with those others he was all busy looking at photographs. «To Shit», Tommaso continued, almost singing, «why don't you go and call you an asshole? And, late, you know!"

But even Shitter had too much to do to move from there. He looked at Tommaso sweetly, with his eyebrows pulled at him and snapped, sputtering: "Not even four!"

«If, 'and four!» said Tommaso, "it's night!"

«Fuck...!» Shitter said in a low voice: and he went back to looking at the photograph that one of his companions showed him.

He looked at her, lowering his eyelids slightly, and then made a face that no one would have ever imagined: the soft jaws already with some wrinkles, the mouth that looked like a gash, with two lips of pale, almost white flesh, the watery eyes and without eyebrows, the big head already a little cheeky, with the luscious curls down his neck, everything had swelled into a laugh that forced him to lower himself down to the point where he had his cuck over the barrel.

«What, are you an athlete too?» she said, breaking down laughing.

The other, a certain Nazzareno, snatched the photograph from his hands, looking him in the eyes.

«Drop off!» he said, with his lower lip so bent and pulled from disgust that it reached under his ass.

«Drop off!» he repeated, without finding another word. And then she looked at him, shaking the little chicken head she had on, as if to say: "Look, you're wrong! Look, you misunderstood!"

Even as he continued to disembowel himself with laughter, Shitter gave him a bitter look: "Go and go to Santa Calla," he shouted. "It goes!"

«What, are you better?» Buddha, who was the third in the company, snapped: having said that, he put his wallet out of his pocket, began to delicately sort through the sections with his fingers, and finally took a photograph, showing himself, other friends of his, and the Shitter.

They stood in swimsuits, in a row, those in the back standing, those in front crouched down: and they all looked towards the camera acting rude. Everyone swelled up to appear bigger: there was Nazzareno who looked as if he was about to die due to the effort he made in broadening his pectorals and pushing his shoulders forward while keeping his hands on his hips. Shitter looked like an old woman, dry as a cod. Looking at him, both the Buddha and Nazarene began to laugh out loud now; but more than laughter they were screams, which sanded his throat and made him make such an effort that he had to bend at the waist and roll almost under the table.

Shitter looked at them detachedly, with his eyebrows raised, his eyes bleary and his lips pursed: but it was clear that he too wanted to laugh.

Tommasino watched laughing, all red, waiting for them to stop. When they calmed down a bit, he took his wallet out of the inside pocket of his jacket.

«To bells!» she said with an air of compassion. «Here they are, the hunks», he then added, patiently, and almost screaming, because there, just a stone's throw away, there was a never-ending caciarà, between the little band and the creaking of the steps of the Fijians of a whore who were dancing the samba.

In the first photograph, there were him, Lello, Zucabbo and Carletto, in Ostia. Zucabbo and Carletto were sitting on the step of the shed cheating on each other behind their wet heads; he was half sitting and half leaning against the wooden railing; in the centre, against the door, secluded, wearing a pair of tight briefs, all cute, serious, straight, well-built, there was Lello.

Tommaso shoved the photograph under the noses of his companions, almost without even letting them see it. He put it back in his wallet and took out another one. In this one there were only him, Lello and Zucabbo, all dressed up, walking side by side across Ponte Garibaldi: they had had it that summer, and behind them you could see a troop of pilgrims, who were turning sideways. All three were walking with their hands in their pockets: it was good weather, they only had their shirts on, and you could see very well what bibs they had on them. Even the others were barely able to see this photograph, because Tommaso rubbed it against their nose, just to make him smell the smell. «To you assholes!» he finally did it again, triumphant. And to conclude he took one last photograph, winking at Shitter.

It was a small photograph, even smaller than the passport-sized ones, and Tommaso held it by the selvages between his thumb and forefinger: holding it high up he turned it towards the Buddha and Nazarene. It was a photograph of Mussolini, black in the face, under a cap with an eagle.

The Buddha and Nazzareno didn't bother Tommaso at all, so as not to give him satisfaction, and only looked at the photograph askance, just enough for them to be a little surprised when they saw who it was.

«But fuck..., go!» slurred the Buddha, "what does this fucking bastard have to do with us, here, as a Spy!" Spy, after Piedizozzi, was the new nickname they gave to Tommaso. Then the Buddha yawned, stretched himself, preparing to take care of other things, and didn't even hear Tommaso looking at Mussolini and saying: «Here he is, who was the man!», and was standing there in admiration, all bad.

With a burst of anger, as if thinking about it, Shitter suddenly said: "Well, what's the matter with this asshole de Lello?"

«You understood it, yes», said the louche and bitter Tommaso, carefully placing the photograph in his wallet. The samba was over, but since the orchestra played the songs in threes, the couples all remained standing, while those who were left without a woman moved around, rubbing against the walls, winking at those who they were already dancing, for the next round.

Shitter started screaming in the middle of the room, splashing saliva. «To Lello, your damn thing!»

But Lello was in the middle of the crowd of couples, and he didn't even hear it, or, if he felt it, he was acting like an Indian. Shitter, followed by

Tommasino, started searching, going around the room against the rubble slabs. At that moment the orchestra started in full swing with the Charleston. As if someone had put a finger in their backsides, all the dancers jumped: they bent down a little on their knees, standing on their toes, and began to throw their balls here and there like villains.

Shitter and Puzzilli immediately charmed Lello, who, given that he was the best heel in Pietralata, was just waiting for the Charleston to prove it. His joke, even if it was completely serious and curmudgeonly, was a better spirokona than him, and holding her skirt against his thigh with one hand, she had gone wild. "The unfortunate man," Shitter shouted at Lello as he passed near him. He didn't even answer. And the two buddies had to wait, quietly, for Lello to act as beautiful as and when he wanted.

It was suffocating heat outside: the sun had now set, and, in the fog that covered Pietralata and the surrounding countryside, only the last light remained.

They went down the increasingly crowded street, now that evening was coming, all full of young people shouting and singing, and kids making a racket.

The three partners arrived at the end, at the car shelter, passing in front of Lello's mother, still sitting at her stall, with a barricade of kids around her.

Lello didn't even look at her, and, as they were huddled against the pillars of the shelter, he slurred, continuing to chew his gum: "Aòh, I was born tired!", and began to yawn, without finishing it.

The car never arrived. Tommaso looked around with his lively eyes, satisfied, thinking about the wonderful program that awaited them.

Shitter was leaning against the column, next to Lello, like a bag of rags, with the collar of his coat pulled up, and with dirty curls wet from the fog on top. He had a smooth coat, tattered and tattered, which went down to his shins, making him look like a priest, and he took advantage of looking like such a funny thing to do even more straight.

He was the son of a scausa and a zaraffa, and had two or three other brothers, scattered throughout Rome. His father spent two years in the shop and a month outside: and it could be said that Shitter had never seen him. His mother had started living life when he was a kid. In Ponte Garibaldi where she went to fight, because her pimp lived in Campo Buozzi, they called her the Old Woman, because of her all-white hair.

When Shitter, around the age of thirteen or fourteen, learned that his mother was a scaja, he waited until he was a little bigger: and two or three years later he showed up at her house, grabbed her by the throat and said to her: « Now you give me five bullets a day, otherwise I'll kill you." Scared, she promised them to him, because Shitter wasn't joking at all: so, secretly from the pimp, he passed fifteen sacks to his son every month. Therefore, on that side, Shitter was quite calm. The other pranks he got into were more for vices than for bread.

Rome was all dripping. Especially around the Tiber, from Testaccio to Porta Portese, to the Lungaretta. Water fell down so thick and light that it melted before reaching the pavement. The avenues and alleys were full of that hot steam, where the Aventine was floating on one side and Monteverde on the other.

It was six or seven in the evening, and so when Tommaso, Lello and Shitter went down from the 13th to the gardens in front of Ponte Quattro Capi, everything was empty or almost there, there were only the first sluts who were starting to turn and a passage of scooters flying from Ponte Garibaldi to Caracalla; but as soon as we crossed the bridge, on the Lungaretta, there was all the confusion of Sunday evening. The youngsters passed in cliques, leaving the Reale, the Esperia, the Fontana, or some of the priests' louses, venturing out to get some fresh air before going to dinner.

Everyone, the coats and shawls, wore them only for appearance: and Lello was right to have gone out without a coat or jacket - apart from the fact that he didn't have one.

all handsome and shabby with the sweater with red and blue banners, and around his neck, tightly rolled up, a gray silk handkerchief with little red flowers.

The headquarters of the MIS was in Vicolo della Luce. But Tommaso and the others didn't need to get there: they met Ugo at the corner of the alley.

He was lighting a straw: that's why he stopped there at the corner, and was making a grimace that made his whole face wrinkle, under the waves and the curls as hard as serci.

"Well?" Tommaso asked him, raising his hand uncertainly in mid-air. He threw the match away, taking a deep breath.

Then with his tongue clamped between his lips he squirted out some snot of tobacco that was bothering him and he didn't want to detach from his wet mouth.

«I greet you, Moretti», he then said, shaking hands with the three. Tommasino immediately returned to the topic, irritable, with his nose wrinkled as if he smelled something he smelled: "How are you here?" he asked him, starting to walk towards the MIS headquarters, along the alley.

"There's no one down there anymore, come on," said Ugo.

"But how!" Tommasino replied, with the other two watching curiously.

"Coletta said we're waiting here, in Piazza dei Ponziani, come on," added Ugo, and without waiting for anything else he went down the Lungaretta.

"Why?" Tommasino asked, walking after him, dissatisfied.

Ugo took the fourth position: he clasped his hands as if he intended to say the Pater Noster. Then with a quick gesture he turned them over, still joined, but on the knuckle side, with the tips of the fingers against the chest: when they were like this, he clasped the tips of the fingers together, and quickly shook his hands against the chest and under the chin, five or six times, interrogative; then he blurted out: "What do you care!"

He spat and started walking down the Lungaretta again, all glistening with hot rain.

In Piazza dei Ponziani there were Enrico, the Fool and Salvatore. They saw them immediately because since the little square was a little out of the way, it was half empty, they were grouped together on the corner of Via dei Vascellari, under the bar.

Tommasino and the others went to meet him and shook hands. The three new ones didn't even move: they remained with their backs against the wall, with one leg long and the other either with its foot also against the wall, or crossed. They were half yawning, waiting, because between that there was the place of the episode. They only feebly raised their right hands, without changing the blissful and mocking expression on their faces. So, perhaps to pass the time, they were lighting up the olive grove, which was on the other side of the road with the wooden bucket of olives on the pavement. «Coletta?» Ugo asked just to ask. "Mo' viè," said one of the three, with eyes that looked like two bright, prosperous ones.

"What, are we alone?" Tommaso said disgustedly.

«Well, shall we do it?» he retorted that.

Tommaso, who was very dark in the face and was looking around askance, gave a bitter laugh at that outburst, his flat mouth opening to reveal his brown and jagged teeth.

Meanwhile, the one with the neon eyes, the Fool, walked dazedly but decisively towards the Olivaro, followed by the gaze of his companions.

«Give me fifty lire of olives, a sor maè!» said the Fool.

The master, who was a sheep farmer who came from who knows what village in Abruzzo, looked towards the Fool's hand which was holding the money, and stretched out his own to pocket it. The Fool gave it to him and he was just about to put the ladle in the water, collecting it, when he realized by touch that the coin was stupid: he looked at it and saw that they were fifty old cents, from the past. He smiled slightly. «I don't know anything!» he said, his eyes lighting up.

The Fool didn't laugh at all. «I don't know how good?» he looked serious and fired up with indignation. «Look, you're wrong, a morè», he added immediately, conciliatory, as if with the intention of putting a stone over his distraction. But the little boy continued to have a silly smile on his face, and was glancing to the right and to the left. Meanwhile the others had also approached.

«Aòh, well, will you give them to me or won't you give me these olives?» said the Fool, losing his patience again.

"Give me some good money!" he did the one with the corners blocking his eyes.

The Fool lowered his head, looking from bottom to top, and clicking his tongue a little against the roof of his mouth as if it were bitter: and he began in a low, rested voice: «Aren't they good? Aren't I good?" Then snapping: «How dare you despise this money, a beggar? Do you know that this money has history? Come on, sugar 'em. And again, pay attention to, you know, distinguishing the good money! But look, you have to see! I don't know! I would punch you in the mouth!" Olivaro continued to laugh at the shamefaced woman. «This is the only real money there was in Italy», Salvatore added, shouting from afar, «what a moron! And give us the rest too, hurry up!»

At that moment Coletta and five other six emerged from the end of Via dei Vascellari. Coletta was a tall guy, dark, thin, with a long head and too much hair that hung high behind him, and with a greenish face cut by a crooked mouth.

His eyes were always serious, like those of a child offended by someone, and he looked fixedly, as if he always harbored pain and anger inside him.

The others were almost all Fiji de papa, some with duffel coats, some with Bernardonis, their faces swollen and purple, bags under their eyes and their throats with the black fuzz of a poorly trimmed beard on their tonsils. Among these there was also a friend of Tommaso's, who lived near him, on the Tiburtina, a certain Alberto Proietti, who looked like Alberto Sordi: but he was already an accountant, and lived in a small villa before the Fiorentini, with some festoons devoured of grapes under the cornice, and velvet in the courtyard. Tommaso was puffed up at seeing him, and went to solemnly shake his hand.

Meanwhile Shitter had fantasized about eating some olives. He turned to the prankster quickly: "Give me a hundred," he said, putting his hand in his coat pocket. The buro was dying. The Shitter made a face at him: "Give me a packet of one hundred," he said again. Then the Olivaro said: "The money first." Shitter him

he gave one more patient look. «Look...» she said affably, «give me a hundred lire of olives». "The money first," repeats the other stubborn one, given that, poor guy, who knows how many times they had done it alone.

Shitter was hit by a volley, he raised one foot, grinding his teeth, and was about to loosen a kick at the bucket: "Now I'll give this bucket a push, I'll give it to you in the middle of the square, fuck it in der cu...!" he shouted. «Come on, give me these olives!» The man, now resigned, perhaps even ready to be hanged, continued to act like a bastard: "No, no, money in hand," he said.

Shitter was silent and looked at him. Slowly his face swelled, his mouth, tight, went up towards the corner of his nose, his eye came out. All the muscles in his face trembled, as if he were shedding his skin. He seemed unsure whether to let himself go into convulsions of rage and kick that bigoted face in front of him, or whether to burst out laughing.

«Aòh, what», he shouted at the end, in an almost low voice, «did you see my face? I'll throw you a hundred lire on my face!"

No sooner said than done, he tremblingly took two and three spears out of his pocket, grabbed one, suddenly placed it in the water, and with a bang that could be heard in all the alleys around, stuck it against the Olivaro's snout. Then without even looking at him, he went, still trembling, towards

his companions, who had been standing in a circle for months, laughing, watching. Coletta clapped him on the shoulder, and then said, addressing everyone: «'Namo!», moving at the head of the company, with his big head that seemed painted on a banner, towards the Ponte Rotto.

They all went away sprightly, some here, some there.

Coletta went away with his hands in his pockets, always ahead, looking straight ahead with his compressed eye, white as a shotgun.

Since he had all the responsibility for seriousness, the others were a bit disorganized, they followed him like parrots. Ugo, who was the one who had had his father and brother shot by the partisans, and who now lived alone with his mother, working as a scratchman, walked with Enrico and Salvatore, saving all the rubbish that passed by.

The other half-students followed in pairs like ducks, and Tommaso had stuck close behind him, alongside his friend Alberto Proietti, proud of the company, because those weren't starving like the other buddies up in the village. . "I make money hanging out with these guys," thought Tommaso, all red. «I also gain prestige! What, are you going to go get a coffee or go to a cinema with these or those ricotta guys? This one, the most wretched man, stands in the sun, has a father who is a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer: all people who don't tremble!"

They sliced up the entire piece from Ponte Rotto to Largo Argentina. Here they met other cliques, who came with an indifferent air like them, from the sections around there, Borgo Pio or Ponte or Panigo; and even the furthest ones, Monteverde or Alberone, because quite a few buses passed through there. But among them they all acted as Americans, they didn't know each other, and they continued to do their own thing, each on his own. Only Coletta said: "Wait," and she went down to a florist under the turret, where Monteverde's troop passed, led by a short, shady little guy, who was laughing like a creature. With that, Coletta went down an alley, towards a half-empty dairy. After a while she reappeared, with a bundle in her hand.

The others huddled along the wall of Largo Argentina, under the tower, and lit up their junk.

When Coletta returned, Ugo was bending over a woman who was passing by in a red dress, and was slobbering on her rump, all in ecstasy: "Are you going to take a poop, darling?"

But Coletta, with his bundle under his arm, hastily cut it off, raised his heels, and said: «Let's go, come on!»

Still acting indifferent, they continued their journey. It was a Sunday, and it really looked like a bunch of youngsters going to Altieri, which was in those parts, having a laugh or singing a song. They passed in front of Masetti, cut towards Piazza della Minerva, and there, in a small alley in sight of the Rotonda, they made another stop.

Coletta called Lello, gave him the bundle, and once again walked away, towards Piazza della Rotonda, behind the lines of taxis and bottles, while the other gangs continued to arrive from all the alleys. When he returned, after another ten minutes, his face had changed: he looked like someone resurrected, with his eyes shining above his jaws as white as bars of soap. The time had come.

Ugo, Salvatore, the Fool and the others were spitting on the cats lying on the stones of the Pantheon, from the parapet. But already the other small groups coming from the alleys were starting to become a crowd, and by now they were greeting each other, they were starting to raise their hackles, get together, mix up, call each other. With Shitter at her side, Coletta walked down towards the little square in front of the Pantheon. Among the rows of wheelchairs and cars, in front of the bars that were starting to lower their shutters, almost a hundred fascists had already gathered.

Lined up here and there, on the sidewalks, in the corners of the streets, on the steps of the fountain, they began to whistle and organize the uproar. As other teams arrived, and the square was almost full, the whistling at the pecorara became louder and more continuous. The taxi drivers and the thugs had retreated next to the journalist, and there, white-faced and collapsed, the dead were slurring.

All the ranks of fascists went towards a corner of the square, at the beginning of Via del Seminario. There was a small hotel there, called del Sole. The waiters had already left, after having closed all the windows as an escape, and only the door was half open, with the owner who every now and then turned his head on us, shitting himself for fear. «Away with the Czechoslovaks!» Meanwhile the MSIs shouted mockingly, and whistled again, louder and louder. "You suck!" they shouted. «Come back since then!» "Did they bring us or did they come?" «Return to your curtain!» «To Czechoslovakia!» one shouted, and five or six companions around him

made a chorus of raspberries. «Be good!» the owner recommended it. «What's my fault, yes, the Czechoslovaks screwed me!»

At that time, from two or three rows, who were passing their voices to each other, they heard: «'Shit! 'Holy shit!' And in fact five or six Marani, involved in that operation, which promised to be so nice, were advancing from the alleys. Quickly, bent over and crouched, half laughing, half babbling, they came forward at a marching pace, with tubs in hand: tubs, tubs, buckets. Everyone was full of a dark yellow cloud, beautifully filled with pneumonia. They took it and started throwing her against the door and wall of the small hotel. A special tactic was needed so that the shit, once thrown, would not risk affecting the person who threw it and the others who were around. They took the bucket nimbly by the handle and the bottom, and off, with a sharp blow, they unloaded it, one here, one there. There was a stench that took your breath away, and everyone laughed and laughed, crumbling.

As they were used, the empty buckets disappeared again. In all fours and fours they overturned a dozen of them against the wall. The liquid dripped onto the wall, which had turned brown. Everyone was now about to act nice, when, suddenly, announced by new screams, Coletta was seen passing with a white face and hair in the wind, with her bundle in her hand, followed by her friends.

He stopped in front of the hotel door, before the owner had time to close it: the owner tried to stop him, but the others held him tight. Coletta lit the fuse with the cigarette butt, ran a few more steps, and threw it into the musty corridor. A bang was heard, and a flash was seen. Then the police siren began to whistle. «The right ones! The right ones!» those further away began to shout. There was a rush, a rush; some continued to whistle and make raspberries, others fought by pushing themselves. The guards arrived from two sides, from Via del Seminario and from Piazza della Minerva: so the Naissini who were caught in the middle began to cut through the other alleys that remained. Some were caught, about ten, others got some turtledoves on the head, and the majority made a run for their money, melting through the neighborhood at full speed.

Tommasino, Shitter, Lello, always together with Coletta, Salvatore, Alberto, Ugo and the Fool, were all running buckled together, like old hyenas, up Via dei Crescenzi. The pole workers were busy, while the faces

above were laughing as if they were walking. «Go to Le'!» Tommaso shouted, laughing. «Come on, what are they doing

'na p..... the madams!» They arrived at a crossroads, between Via

Oberdan and Via del Teatro Valle: they took one at random, and came to another crossroads. «Let's go from here». «No, from there». «No, over here», in short they stopped, sweaty dripping like running taps. «Aòh, I'm fed up with my heart, you know», Ugo said ferociously. He was all set up, with the flannel bags, the salt and pepper rasp with the martingale, the halter, the loop and the strap on his wrist. «I'm sorry», he shot, «I'm going to shit myself!» "Me too," said Tommaso, "I haven't had a meal since last night!" «Aòh», said Ugo, becoming furious again, «there's no wrong here, you weirdo!» «Let's go to magnasse 'na rota from Fileni», said Salvatore. Ugo snapped: «Let's go», he said, «and what are we waiting for?»

They didn't go straight to Trastevere via the previous route, but instead. They went to take the circular train at Ponte Vittorio, walking all the way across Via del Governo Vecchio. They then got off at Ponte Garibaldi, and took Viale del Re, where, just above the Esperia cinema, there was the pizzeria they were talking about.

It was completely full, and by chance there was only one table in a small corner, near the oven. They threw themselves into it, brawling and being all naughty, among the people who were eating pizza around the tables. «Vajece!» they shouted, "Go!" as if instead of in a pizzeria they were in the square. They threw themselves laughing like marani on the chairs and immediately called the barman. «Six wheels!» they shouted, «And two liters of sweet wine!» «Make it to me with mushrooms», ordered Ugo. "We too, then," shouted the others, "who are we pilgrims?"

Nearby there was another table of young men from Trastevere, but bigger. They knew each other, and they greeted each other by barely moving their fingers as if they had been smeared with glue. «Hello, to Paciocco!» Ugo said to a young man as broad and pale as a fresh bunch of escarole. This winked at him, then, slowly taking the glass in his hand, he began to look at Ugo, fixedly, with a laughing eye. As soon as he had sucked it, he put down the glass, still looking at Ugo, and said: «But look, New Year's Eve has yet to come! Wait, take away those wet rags!»

Ugo made a paragus face, and shouting, because everyone in the pizzeria was shouting under the neon tubes, at the tongues of fire coming

from the oven, he replied serenely: "We are always bullies, and we can do it!"

"If, if," said the good-natured young man, raising and lowering his head, "but the tyranny is over for you now!"

Ugo replied dryly and triumphantly: «We were able to do tyranny, but the rest of you still can't do it!»

«Because we are not executioners like you!» replied the communist. Ugo passed him by, still acting calm, already ready to shoot, and his other companions were also starting to get annoyed, especially Tommaso, who was looking at those at the next table, with an anger in his eyes that would have torn them to pieces raw with everything. the hair.

Ugo changed his voice and expression, as if instead of the blond man, he was speaking to the wind: «We are the executioners! Executioners were your companions, those of your idea, who killed my father and my brother!"

The other took a while before answering, smiling vaguely, also in the wind, he took the glass back in his hand, crushed it a little, then said: «Let's fly over! Make another quarter, I'll make it mine, and that's how this discussion ends."

The waiter arrived with the routes and the two hulls, and all fastened with the mamatron, he began to put them on the table, while others called him from another part.

"I think I'm fat in my core," said Salvatore, who had his back turned to his companions. «But I would hold it against them, er heart», said Tommaso in a low voice, with a yellow face of hatred. "If they gave me carte blanche, it would put them all with their faces against the wall!"

Shitter had already started eating pizza. He had cut it into four parts, taken one with his hands, folded it, and ate it like a loaf of bread. The others did as he did and, laughing and drinking, they began to gorge themselves, trying to punish each other with wine. After a while, since the waters had calmed down in the evening, the big guy calmed us down again: «Aòh», he turned with a biting expression towards Ugo, «I'll pay you half a liter, let it become my color!»

Ugo looked at him angrily, starting to speak with saliva splashing at the corners of his mouth: «What, do you even want to subject me? What do you think you are superior to me? You understand a thing about politics...! Listen, I had faith in that man: think as you like, but what she did was all

for the well-being of us people! Before there was no scandal, what are you doing today! Look at the Mussolini Forum, look at all the projects that have been made and that today you know were actually there! Because you betrayed him! I would resurrect him... Then spit in your face!»

One of the blonde's companions bumped his elbow, but he was already controlling himself: in fact he was smiling affably, although Tommaso's voice could be heard distinctly, his eyes dripping with venom, saying: "The hell with these murderers!"

Two liters is a lot, but they quickly drained it. So the Fool ordered another. They drained that too. Little by little they all became cheerful again and a frenzy seized them that they couldn't keep still. One sang on his behalf, one put his feet on the table. Finally Shitter opened his mouth and said: «Aòh, I feel like I'm in a ball tonight. You would hear about the robbery of the century ago."

Everyone, although laughing, pricked up their ears, because Shitter wasn't joking much.

«Well then», said the Fool, «if you feel so strong, let's go on an adventure!»

«'Namo, 'namo, 'namo!» Lello shouted, "I'm already tired of being here!"

They had all arrived. His eyes shone like embers in his brown faces. «Aòh», Salvatore shouted already enthusiastically, «do we want to screw Alduccio's oven, those two bags of flour?»

«But what do you do with two bags of flour!» said the Fool, raising his hand. «But then let's go and see more of those two rolls of copper, down there at the Majana railway!»

"What are you crazy about?" said Ugo, «now the copper from the railway is scuffed! I would rather have a tobacconist to do. Are you there?" '

"We need to make a machine, then!" he did already ready to kick up your heels, Salvatore.

«And what do I want?» Lello then said, all fresh, with his blissful smile under his slightly disheveled nock. "You will understand! In two minutes we'll unpack it, pack up and get on board!"

Having said this, he took it and got up, walking straight without turning towards the exit of the pizzeria, in front of the mouth of the oven.

Quickly, the Shitter got up, in the bell to be the bully, and, like an old dog, went after him.

Outside the air was getting hotter. On Viale del Re the bars had tables outside, with many people having their drinks. On the plane trees everything was full of little birds: there were thousands and thousands of them on the branches still full of half-dead leaves, and, chirping, they made an uproar that was almost deafening. Some kids were walking around underneath us with slingshots, in their shirts.

Cheerful, with Shitter at his heels, Lello headed towards Ponte Garibaldi, took it, took via Arenula, and returned to Largo Argentina.

Here the two stopped and mocked the movement. They immediately realized that it was a good place. They walked around the square, then took a look at Via Botteghe Oscure. Since there was a concert at the Teatro Argentina, everything around there was full of cars, so there was no movement. Next to a row of cars, in a small space at the beginning of Via Botteghe Oscure, there was a boasting TV set aside, with its nose out.

Lello approached it, looked around, pressed his knee hard against the door, grabbed the handle firmly with both hands and gave it a sharp knock. The door opened, and Lello slipped behind the steering wheel, opening the other door. Shitter entered from there and immediately tore off the wires: he bundled them up, and bending them down a little, he held them with his left hand, while with his right hand he held the light wire. Lello started the car, took Via Botteghe Oscure, and, on the Ponte Rotto side, in two minutes he was back in front of the pizzeria on Viale del Re.

«Grrranadaaa...» could be heard singing inside, in the crowd and the smoke: against the mouth of the oven there were two musicians, green as two prison barrages, and everyone, to the music, ate and chatted louder.

«To you assholes!» Lello said as he was at the table of his friends, who now looked like so many pomegranates, after the third tube they had sucked. And immediately he retraced his steps, towards the exit, without waiting for them.

The others, who had already paid, got up and chained themselves to him.

They appeared outside, all cheerful, the braggart, threw themselves into it and immediately set off towards the Trastevere station.

«Grrranadaaa...» Salvatore began to sing, happy, with his dark face, as he slouched on the seat, «tierra dreamed for me!»

Everyone, some standing tall and some looking out, pointed like a dog, with their eyes laughing at him. Ugo stuck his head out of the window, and,

at the meccas that passed, he shouted: «What an intrepid sorceress! Golden shit! Lacquered pussy!» «Shall we go?» Salvatore said enthusiastically, interrupting the song. «Aòh, let's go aòh», Tommaso said equally cheerfully.

Shitter turned sideways, holding the strings, opened his mouth and said: «A vive!»

Meanwhile they went to a dark road, between Porta Portese and L'Ammazzatora, and there they arranged the wires by twisting them, then set off at full speed towards Testaccio. They drove around the Tiber for a while, then went off in the direction of San Giovanni, singing and having mad joy. All at once the Fool shouted; «See, see, that's a fake car!»

«To Lello, to Lello, appizzateje afterwards», shouted Ugo immediately, «we'll see where it stops and where it stops if we do it!»

This fake car was an old and shiny dark Capitan, which went slowly, without haste, with bags, suitcases and a wheelchair on the trunk. Inside were a man, a woman and a couple of kids.

Lello began to follow her: so they crossed the square of San Giovanni, and, walking and walking, they arrived at Via Casilina, at the Torpignattara crossroads, in front of the German Pilgrims' hotel. It was all deserted there, only cars passed by, and a few empty tramways. Those inside the Capitan go down, ring the bell, the guardian comes to open the door, and they go inside.

Everything had to be done in a minute, before the waiter came to take the things. «Aòh, who is that crossed over?» Shitter hissed. "I!" said Tommaso, taking out one of those American knives with the screwdriver, corkscrew and can opener. Shitter and Tommaso got out and went under the car: Tommaso began to cut the belts with a knife: Shitter took the wheelchair, which was in the way, and slammed it on the pavement. In less than a minute, they returned to the braggart, who had the doors open and the engine running, holding jacks and bells in his hands. They charged and trotted off, just as the lights in the gatehouse and the little garden came on.

It started to rain again, from the red clouds that shrouded the city: the braggart sped through all that water like a motorboat, taking curves under steering. «I really like being in the car when it rains!» Salvatore gloated. «I know two things that I like!» he added, while the car splashed through the puddles, "it's in the car when it rains, and it's shitting on the lawn, looking at the people passing by on the street!"

They arrived at the bridge over the railway, entered the arches of Piazza Lodi, took refuge in San Giovanni, crossed through Porta Metronia and the Passeggiata Archeologica, and after two minutes they were once again in Trastevere, under the rain that was coming down in cascades, playing cheerfully on the cobblestones the shared.

They cut through Piazza Santa Maria, took an alley, and stopped in another alley, all dark, near Piazza Renzi.

Ugo got out and, running in the warm rain, grazing the walls, went to Piazza Renzi and quickly turned into a tavern which was the only light in the whole square. He put his nose inside him, looked at his friend, approached him and slurred: "I owe you a parlà!" Then, at a glance from him, he came out of the door and started waiting for him under the eaves.

After a moment the buddy was there. «I've got certain cliques now», said Ugo, «I don't know what's inside them. Do you plan?"

«Well», said the old man, «it's stuff that if it fails, bring it up! I'll go ahead and enter my house."

«Look», said Ugo, «there are four cliques, I just don't do it. I'm bringing you my friend!" «And one of the law!» he then added, to reassure the moresca, resuming the run towards the car.

«Okay», he accepted, «but do something during the day!» and he went the other way towards his alley.

After less than a minute Ugo and Shitter were already following him, with the rebuke. They took the alley full of rubbish floating on the water, entered a small door, went up the stairs, with only one electric light bulb dancing in the wind, and stopped at a completely dark landing: the door was only ajar and they entered.

The Moorish woman was there waiting, and took them into an empty room, with a small table and two or three chairs. Ugo and Shitter put down the bag, four suitcases and two bags, and immediately all three began to open them, tearing off the zips. They took a look at what was inside, almost all clothes, underwear and books, and began to bargain. «You blaspheme how much you support us», Shitter said threateningly. "Say a bad word!" The old man offered twenty-five thousand; the two buddies wanted at least fifty loins. No yes, yes no, the old man had the usual idea of hunting for money and showing it off, because he knew his chickens: they were enticed when they saw the ciavatta, and, eager to grab it straight away, they accepted the price he said. he.

He went to a sofa, where a large doll was leaning, one of those used for charity peaches; he took off her head and took out a nice loaf of dough, together with a revolver that was there among her bags. Shitter immediately enlightened him, completely absorbed. «Let me have a look!» he said: he grabbed it and held it very well. «What, are you loaded?» he asked, looking at her. “No,” said the old man, who had remained there a little dazed, working, with the doll in his hand.

Shitter looked at him, then looked at the bread with his eyes eating it up. «Come on, twenty-five bags, fuck....» he said, trembling, «but you try

above all 'a witty!' The Moorish girl began to cry, saying that it was dangerous, that he didn't want to get into trouble and that this and that: but in the end he said yes, and they compared.

"Just don't say where it came from!" the old man recommended himself: but the two didn't even listen to him, running away all corny, lively like two dogs of the Lord. The car was there, in the dark, with the others inside, silent as the corpses of the dead: they divided the money, that is, little more than four bags each, and set off again.

«Shall we go?» Salvatore asked with a heart full of joy. «Have a drink!» said Shitter, whose eyes were dripping like a dog. "Street!" Tommaso shouted. Lello wandered here and there at random along two or three alleys, then took Ponte Sisto and launched the car along the Tiber. It wasn't raining anymore, some patches of clear sky were lightening up in the sky. In three seconds they arrived at the Ponte Rotto, in another three seconds at the Ponte Sublicio, and in another three at the Ostia station, they turned with their wheels smoking close to the pyramid, whistling to two or three hookers who were stationed on those lines, they went along Via Marmorata and took Testaccio. They had a patch that was eye-opening. A truck was stopped in Via Zabaglia, and the entire road was blocked. It was a truck full of Christmas trees: the side had come loose, and the trees, which were all stacked up, had collapsed in the middle of the road. The driver got busy, putting a crosspiece in place of the pin. But in the meantime we couldn't get through that pile of wet Christmas trees, and the kids were messing around.

«Aòh, I'm hungry, you know», shouted Tommaso resentfully, seeing a trattoria nearby. «Aòh, he's not going back, aòh», he immediately said to Lello, an ally of Tommaso Salvatore. Lello, since he didn't feel like backing up, got out, laughing, and slammed the door, heading straight towards the restaurant. "Let's go, let's go," he shouted.

They were all alone in the restaurant, and they began to bully: Lello ordered the mussels marinara, Tommaso the testalle, Cagone the capon and a capricciosa pizza, the Matto the four seasons pizza, Ugo the cod fillets and Salvatore the supplì. Then everyone first ordered the cricche crocchi chips, then the pecorino con la lacrima and finally the fennel alla cazzimpero.

They got back on the booster, drunk to the bone, and drove along the Tiber, under the rotten trees that the wind shook, causing handfuls of leaves to fall.

«Aòh, we're still being slaughtered here, you know!» Ugo said as they returned to Lello. "Here we need to try again," he added – angrily, making a face as if he were about to argue. "I'm okay with it," Lello said without much fuss. «It's all about walking!»

Ugo had seized up, angrily, holding both fists with clenched fingers, suspended against his chest at the height of his butt: "Come on, shall we go to bed?" he did it. «Let's venture downtown!» said Salvatore with his usual enthusiasm, "as we go along we'll run into some trouble!"

«Come on, young people», shouted the Fool without further ado, «the world is watching us!», and Tommaso, with a nasal voice and a crooked mouth: «We are always of the same type: win and we will win!»

They returned to Via Marmorata, and continued along the Tiber. «Aòh», said Lello decisively, before starting the engine, «do you feel like trying so many deaf people or years in prison?»

"That? That?" did the others. «Na turnip», said Shitter, and after having munched a bit, he took the revolver out of his pocket. «Hey!» confirmed Lello, who had been immediately understood by his companion. «How much money and to whom?» said Ugo. "If we make a petrol station attendant," said Lello calmly, who was already revving the car for the Portuense. "Where?" Ugo asked. «A good guy, someone who can do it, like Cristoforo Colombo, like Appia, like Ardeatina, where do we want to go?»

Everyone was there for the crime, they got into a bit of a fight arguing about which protection, then they went towards Ponte Milvio, and headed towards Cassia towards a place that Ugo knew about. Cutting through the Janiculum and Monte Mario, they immediately arrived in the middle of the countryside, all hilly. After a few kilometers in the midst of meadows and woods, with pieces of Rome shining here and there in the distance, Salvatore, the Fool and Tommasino, who however didn't want to hear about

it, and argued a bit before soaking up, got out and they started waiting against a rise, with dogs barking around them, in the farmhouses.

The other three showed up at the petrol station, just before the Storta, Lello at the wheel, Shitter next to him, and Ugo in the back seat.

They approached, it was all dark and deserted, with only the Shell shell shining as big as the moon.

"Fifteen litres, per morè," Lello said to the petrol station attendant: this was a young man of about twenty-five or thirty, bloated from cecagna. He began to serve, bending down to insert the pump into the tank. Meanwhile, Lello, yawning, said to Shitter: "Look at the tyres, how they're doing."

With that excuse, softly, Shitter got out and looked at the tires. «The tires are fine!» he said. He didn't even finish saying that, and he pointed his gun at the gas station attendant, who was reattaching the pump. He held it two centimeters from his chest, and made his whole hand shake to show that he was afraid, because when someone is afraid that's the time to shoot. But he didn't need to struggle, because he was seriously shaking, not from fear but from anger. "Give me the money!" he said. "Just don't kill me, I have a family," said the petrol station attendant, white as a candle, quickly taking off his bag and giving it to Shitter. The latter, still holding the gun on his back, took a look inside the bag and saw that there was little ciavat.

She gnawed her teeth, and looked at his face again, her lips twisted in anger. "Come inside the hut," she ordered him.

The petrol station attendant immediately obeyed, and with the piece placed behind him, entered the shed. «Open all the drawers», Shitter ordered again. He obeyed again, and in a drawer Shitter found more money; he grabbed them and put them in his head. Then he locked the petrol station attendant inside the shed, shouting at him through the windows: "Don't move, I'll burn you!"

He dived into the car, holding the gun at his side, and the car sped off.

"How much did we raise, how much did we raise?" said Ugo. But Shitter was silent as he counted the money. They resumed on Tommaso and the others who had become numb in the damp, with two or three dogs that had run from a farmhouse, and had come to bark at them, running back and forth beyond a thicket.

"How much did you get back?" Tommaso grimaced. Shitter showed the cue. «Vieccce below!» cried the Fool at the sight of the pile of loins. They were about thirty thousand lire. Tommaso's grimace deepened and he said

to Ugo: "What, are these your laces?" «Asshole», replied Ugo, «then you can make up for it, you're always a fool!» Tommaso was silent, with his nose in his mouth, then in response he started singing:

We don't care about a day in jail, we don't care about ugly death...

Thus singing under the stars, they returned to Ponte Milvio, went along the Tiber, entered Ponte Duca d'Aosta, in front of the obelisk, and as soon as they were in the middle of the bridge the Shitter, with a burst of anger, threw out the revolver and then he threw it into the river, shouting: "We don't need you anymore!"

"Why?" Tommaso still vomited, "What an asshole?"

The Shitter turned on him and punched him in the face.

Baccaiano, they took a large avenue that led towards the Flaminia, then Lello drove at random along all those avenues, alleys and squares, until they found a slightly dark road, and there they hit the hundred. They walked around in soles and heels for a while, taking note of the movement around them. There were many vehicles in those parts, lined up along the sidewalks; but almost all with the swab. Finally they found another hundred too, made their own. They caught him and took off again. Tommaso was dissatisfied.

«Aòh, let's make another cry, eh, a petrol station attendant», he said. «This time I'll teach you a straight seat!»

«And then will you take us there?» said Ugo.

"On the Fiumicino road," Tommaso said dryly.

"Go!" he then ordered Lello, who, unaware of fate, handsome and cheerful, drove carelessly with his elbow on the door.

They crossed half of Rome again, and returned to the Via Portuense. Permilio's flame still flickered, high as a throne in the peace of the night.

All around, in the damp that had thickened again, in fumes, in vapors as black as embers, all the neighborhoods with their dying lights seemed to be sleeping in the silence that was there, along the Via Portuense, behind the Forlanini. The moon was already high and also spread yellow on the clouds, swollen and confused in the beautiful spring warmth.

«Let's go calli», Salvatore was very lively, «and who's having a better Christmas than us this year?»

"Stop, stop!" Ugo shouted all at once.

"Stop!" he repeated furiously. Lello slammed on the brakes, and the car wobbled a little in the wet. They were passing through a clearing in Portuense, as wide as a square, with many small houses and buildings sleeping around, behind a wall, at the end of the last pavilions of the Forlanini, with a deserted avenue on the left and on the right, in front of a piss man, a petrol station attendant. with the light on. Passing by, Ugo had seen that, inside the glass hut, the petrol station attendant had taken a nap.

"Pull over!" he hissed at Lello.

«Come on, let's continue, fuck...!» Tommaso said angrily.

«Shut up, fuck... wrapped up, face work!» said Ugo.

"But are you stopping here?" Tommaso became stubborn, raising his hand and arm as long as they were. «What the hell are you doing in prison? but let's go where I say!" Ugo didn't bother with it at all. "Come on, come on," he said to the Fool, with a face like his ass, but with a mouth that, due to his nerves, made him laugh. The Fool went after him, after Lello had pulled the car up to the gravel pavement, and Ugo quickly went towards the petrol station attendant's hut which glittered in that pitiful silence.

«Come on, let's punish the second too!» he whispered to her.

«See how cute he is!» said the Fool, in a low voice, looking at the petrol station attendant who was sleeping inside the shed.

He must have fallen asleep fast, as he found himself, caught up in sleep, on the lounge, with his head leaning back against an edge of the glass wall, and his bag on his thigh. He had on a blue overall and a mop with a visor that sat crooked on his black quiff. The Fool slowly opened the glass door, while behind him Ugo grabbed the little platform that was there under him, and held it tightly in his hands, ready to break his head if he woke up. Having opened the door, slowly, as lightly as a cat, the Fool slipped in and began to put his hand on the bag above the petrol station attendant's belly. While he worked with his hands, he looked him straight in the face, not taking his eyes off him for a moment. He must have been a Burino, perhaps who had come to Rome recently, from Abruzzo or Puglia: he could be seen from his broad, sunburned face, with his mouth that had a somewhat foolish expression even in his sleep, and from the strength that you could tell through the folds of his unbuttoned suit.

With his left hand the Fool held the bag up just a little, and with his right he opened it and grabbed the money inside, even grabbing the nickels. Then he retreated, still looking at the petrol station attendant, and closed the

door. Ugo placed the platform in front of us, and they ran back towards the car. But they hadn't even turned around before they saw Shitter who had come after them. Yellow as a corpse, he was bent over the compressor, and, grinding his teeth with the effort, he was tearing it from its place, making an effort that seemed to remain there. He was breathing hard, and a sort of gasp came out of his throat. «What are you doing in Cagò?» the Fool asked breathlessly. But he didn't answer. It was no joke, and Ugo was taken by the spagheggio. "Leave him alone," he said, "he's so scratchy!" But Shitter couldn't hear anyone. So to hurry up, Ugo gave him a hand. They unbolted the compressor from the ground, and the two of them carried it towards the car. They managed to get him inside, and Shitter sat half on it, while the car rocketed off towards Fiumicino.

Tommaso stood straight, like a snail when it comes out of its little house, and points its horns high. He looked forward, observing the road, towards the place he mentioned, with his face having become almost brown, as if he had put it on the fire, while the others shared the blame. He eyed the piles of identical blocks of flats flying backwards in the darkness, then the bigozed little houses of the Fort, then the Parrocchietta in lace on a hill, then all the countryside swollen with water like sponges, dirty, and finally the Trullo, with its yellow lots lined up and four lamps lit that illuminated the landscape of hunger and death.

"From here?" shouted Lello, as he unloaded the odometer towards the Magliana.

"Yes," said Tommaso, his mouth crooked. But Shitter suddenly shouted: "Hold on a bit!" «But which one stops, which one stops!» Tommaso said sourly, "but speed up instead!"

The Shitter turned towards him with his face all drooling and with a broken voice he shouted at him: "Oh, damn you!" Then he suddenly turned to Lello: «Stop», he said again angrily, «stop!» Lello sank on the brake, and the car stopped in a small road next to the Magliana railway.

Shitter came down: there was a pine tree and, behind it, a low wall: four shacks around, shattered by the silence, among the muddy gardens, and, above all, a mound of black zella. Shitter went against the wall, behind the remains of two rubbles, and took down his wagons. They heard him sighing and moaning: it seemed that they were torturing him, after having stripped him naked and gagged him, and he could only make a kind of moan, like a cat. He finally returned, buttoning his trousers and tightening his belt: he

was soaked to the core; and even the windows of the car were white, inside with breath, outside with dew, and they were all dripping. Tommaso angrily said to him: «Did you say yes? 'Let's go, come on!' The Shitter turned his face on him and gave him another blow.

The sky was covered with clouds again, all gray and dark. Below, the rows of railroad lights seemed to filter out from beneath the earth. They started running again: but Shitter still felt bad. All that humidity he had gotten had made him feel shitty, and he was twitching, biting his elbows. Every now and then he soaked some loofah, with a suffocating stench, and the others, clutching their noses, had to roll down the windows.

Suddenly Shitter said again: «Stop, stop!» Tommaso became a beast: «Aòh», he shouted at him, «but aren't you tired of shit yet?» «Stop, your damn thing!» Shitter shouted in desperation.

Lello, calm, stopped again. The Magliana had passed, and there were no more houses: only on the left, along the railway, all those lights forgotten by Christ. Shitter ran desperately, pulling his trousers down again, and stood on the side of the road, against a sort of valley full of prickly peckers that rose up towards the sky, between two tuff mountains, affected, and full of prickly peckers too. . Shitter was still there, moaning through clenched teeth, his neck straining in pain. Then slowly he got up, pulled up his trousers, rebuttoned them; the peace was so complete that you could hear a dog barking five or six kilometers away, behind all that wet earth and those slaughtered mounds, towards Rome or towards the sea, you couldn't quite understand: and it seemed like a lost soul crying.

They passed Ponte Galeria at full speed; and meanwhile the first drops of rain began to fall again. It was all dark and deserted. Then, at the end of a curve, we saw some lights: they were a few houses and a tavern. Further back there was the petrol station, in a newly built space in the road, full of white gravel, and all lit up. The petrol station attendant was busy cleaning an isomoto with a rag, with the stub glued to his lip which was burning his eyes with the smoke.

As soon as he saw the customers, he raised his head, and throwing the stub with a schicchera, he looked them over. He immediately made it clear that they were of little concern to him. He too was a buro, with a mass of hair that stood on his head like a crouching bird, a little dark and a little blond: and a dry, sharp, mean face, with high edges. He looked at his friends, asked how much, and went to the petrol pump, slowly, with

calculated calm, ready for any foolish move. The revolver must have been inside the pocket of his suit, one of those deep pockets that reach almost to the knee. Meanwhile, Lello was back at the wheel, all cool, yawning: "A Spia, take a look at the tyres, how they're doing." Tommaso had gotten up, and Ugo had slipped out too. Tommaso had kicked the tires twice and said: "They're fine!", and meanwhile he was looking at the petrol station attendant with his mouth trembling. The moment he took the pump in his hand, he pounced on him, squeezing him by the arms behind the policeman's back: Ugo jumped aside behind him, and put his arm around his throat, squeezing him so badly that he made his eyes pop out. outdoor. Even Shitter had slipped out of the car: he immediately put his hands on the bag, and began to work, moaning as if he were about to cry, and shaking with anger so that he couldn't open it. At that moment, the petrol station assistant came out from behind the shed, up from the edge of the railway. This one stood still for a moment, between the light and the shadow, as if frozen in place. He was a short, tough blond guy, with two wicked light eyes. Immediately he put his hand in his pocket and took out his gun: a small square Maus pistol, and pointed it, ready to hit the four scrapers. The other, held tightly by Ugo's arm, managed to shout: "He won't shoot!" In fact, Shitter and Tommaso immediately went behind the petrol station attendant, taking cover with his body. Tommaso took out the knife and pointed it at the petrol station attendant's side, shouting fiercely at the other: "If you shoot, we'll strip him!" Lello shouted from the steering wheel: "Let's put him in!" The blond boy always stood there still, under the light, with the revolver pointed, without shooting. «Come on, let's load it», Tommaso shouted. On the one from Fiumicino a beam of light was seen, at a curve under the hills, and immediately afterwards a car appeared, speeding at speed, and, behind this, another. They shot past the gas station, flooding everything with light. Without worrying, since they were already busy with work, Ugo, Tommaso and Shitter got back into the car, dragging the petrol attendant with them, who entered right above their legs, half suffocated. Lello started the car, turned it around and off they went like a rocket towards Rome. They just had time to hear the two or three revolver shots that the blond had fired into the air. When they were four or five kilometers from the petrol station, they took the gun away from the petrol station attendant, made him get out, after having snatched his bag, and began to beat him up.

Tommaso held him with his arms behind his back, and Ugo began to massacre him first on his stomach, then on his face. Immediately a little blood began to flow from his teeth and one eyebrow, and he became disturbed. Then Shitter got out too, and with a sort of groan began to kick him on his shoulders, on his face, on his stomach. As Tommaso let go of his grip, and Tommaso fell to the asphalt, Shitter gave him two or three more kicks on his back and everywhere else, wherever he kicked him. Then, all swollen and bleeding, they rolled him down the edge of the railway, between two or three thickets.

It was still raining, and the prairies were full of streaks of white fog, and above, in the sky, the moon shone like a stain of blood. Shitter, after all that hard work, began to feel ill again: he twisted himself with his hands against his belly, and huddled all over, with his head almost between his knees. He contaminated the whole environment, so much so that you could no longer breathe inside the car. But the others didn't even notice, they were all busy dividing the cue between themselves.

As they crossed the Magliana railway, and went down a cul-de-sac road among the reeds, coming out on the new bridge, towards the Eur, Shitter started shouting to stop again.

Lello, laughing, braked, and Shitter tumbled down towards the embankment of the bridge, between the bushes swollen with rain, slipping on the soft, soft mud two arms high. And he couldn't stop until he slipped right under the arch of the bridge, into the tall grass. Here she began to unhook for the third time. Then, clinging to the bushes, he came back up, almost shocked by the effort, white as death. But as soon as he got to the car he didn't get back in, and without saying a word, he grabbed the compressor that he had always kept under his legs.

"What are you doing now?" Tommaso snapped, showing his teeth like a dog. «But damn you!» said the others, all stretching out their hands together, disapproving of his conduct. Ugo grabbed his shoulders, trying to pull him into the car. But Shitter, still silent, without saying a word, freed himself from Ugo and, holding the compressor in his hands which made his urine vein burst due to the effort, he took the same route again, sliding down to under the bridge, getting himself all wet as if he had jumped into the river, and stuffed the compressor in a hole in the mud hidden between the chocks. Then she returned to him, and still without speaking, she sat down in the car again in his place, her teeth chattering.

"You've arrived, you are," Salvatore told him, as the car, having crossed the bridge, headed towards San Paolo.

«You don't even have any breath left to fart!» he continued mockingly.

"Don't tell me!" shouted Tommaso, "if this is not a demonstration, it will intoxicate everyone, in here!"

Shitter was silent, because he really didn't have the breath to respond.

«Now shall we go?» The Fool acted with all the initiative, as if he had only just started driving. They had more than ten bags in their pockets, and now life began.

The last shower of rain fell: then everything around cleared up, wet and shiny, amidst the warm fog. «Do we want to go dancing?» Lello said cheerfully, looking forward, with a smile that lit up his face like a beacon.

«But what a dance, what a dance!» said Ugo who had syphilis in his brain. «And, it's midnight! But let's eat and drink!»

But Tommaso snapped, with the corners of his mouth reaching under his head in disgust: «But what a feast and drink! Loffi! Now let's have some fun, please!"

"He's right!" screamed the Fool.

Lello brightened up even more: "Let's go to U?" he said.

«Let's go and put it!» Ugo immediately agreed.

«We are beautiful, bullies, we dance well, we steal well, we put well!» Salvatore shouted.

The Shitter resurrected, and made a raspberry.

They parked the car in a dark place, next to the Basilica of San Paolo, and headed towards the little bar at the tram terminus, which glittered under the pine trees.

«Let's go to Marianna la Nose!» said Ugo.

"There are six of us!" said the Fool, "she won't let us all come in!"

"I'll talk to you!" said Ugo. «And then we have them deaf! Let's see a couple of red moons, if she drops her underwear too!»

«We're eighteen, then», shouted Salvatore, starting to run towards the terminus.

There wasn't even a smell from the trams. Then they entered the little bar, which was about to close, and shouting like old crows, they ordered a bottle of Peruno liqueur, which they had seen outside in the display cases. Some bewitch, some whiskey, some mistrà: and they went to drink it among the pines, screaming in the deserted square, full of swamps.

All of a sudden Ugo took it and started running like an injured man, towards the deserted avenue of the basilica. «Let's ring the bells!» he shouted. The others, without understanding, ran after him, drinking the liqueur with garganella.

They arrived at the Bersaglieri on the avenue just in time for Ugo to block the taxi that had come from afar.

«'Let's go, to wretches», he shouted, «I'll pay you for half!»

They went up laughing and hitting each other, now completely crippled, blind from the crush.

First, as they got off the taxi, under the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, they met a dog, which was coming straight towards them, on the wet cobblestones of the exit.

«Let's take him and take him with us!» Salvatore shouted, overcome by a rush of affection, and forgetting Nasona, with his eyes showing only white in his eyes.

Swaying, he began to undo the waistband of his trousers.

«But let's leave him alone!» Tommaso shouted instead, looking with anger out of the corner of his eye at the old dog who was making fun of the company.

Moving as if he were swimming, Salvatore, with his trousers falling down, had begun to tie the belt around the dog's neck. He let this sit patiently, looking around.

Ugo was taking a drink of water, swaying, with his legs wide apart and the bottle in his hand, facing towards the basilica, which with its staircases and domes rose up to the clouds. Then he turned and approached the dog too.

«Yes, we see some noctules», he said, «we'll stoke them!»

"To Bobbi," he said then, smoothing his neck.

Salvatore finally managed to tie the belt around his neck, and began to drag him along. The dog sniffed here and there, very happy, especially on the shoes and between the legs.

«But what is this dog, zaghenne?» Tommaso said contemptuously.

«Put on the culambrina!» Shitter slurred at him. «'Namo, Magnabuffi!» Salvatore shouted cheerfully to the dog.

All of a sudden the Fool was also overcome by a rush of affection: he knelt down on the cobblestones shiny with water and began to grab the dog by the hair of the neck, and to rough it: and in doing so he grinded his teeth

and bit himself his lips, rubbing his face against his muzzle and telling him: "You bastard, you bastard!"

Little by little they arrived in the area where Marianna la Nasona lived, towards Via Merulana.

"Over here!" said Ugo, taking an uphill road. «No, this way», shouted the Fool, starting to take another street, full of closed doors and small columns on the facades.

«But no», replied Ugo furiously, «look, he's still up the hill!»

"But don't you remember there was a traffic light?" did the Carpet.

«But no, there they are, the little gardens!» Ugo shouted. «You remember that that time we passed through the gardens!»

«But come with me», Lello shouted, «you're all stuck, you don't understand shit...!»

He went straight up the slope, and the others followed, still arguing, screaming with his lungs cooked, and the dog barking too, with no breath left to make his reasons heard.

They went around and around, made the descent two or three times, passed through the gardens in front of the Brancaccio, went back, through all those streets full of small columns and wrought iron railings, with the doors in a row all closed: but however the door of Marianna the Nose was not they fooled him.

Instead, fatefully, they arrived in front of the Red Cat. They found themselves under a sudden shock, because, because of all that alcohol they had sucked, they had come running down Via dei Santi Quattro, all with dicks in their hands, pissing in a zigzag rush, for the third or fourth time, shouting: «Look at that beautiful calligraphy!»

Forgetting to button up for the nice surprise, Lello took off running towards the illuminated door, with a row of Vespas, Lambrettas, Motoms, Guzzettis, Gileras and Blessed Saints in front of him: a moped jumped, shouting: "Come on, guys!", and the others followed with the dog. Salvatore tied the dog to the handlebars of a motorcycle, quickly, and caught up with the others who had already entered the corridor and were already talking to the head of the room.

"Nothing to do, guys," he said cheerfully, "we'll close in five minutes!"

Ugo stared at him, as if he didn't understand.

“Will none of your faces come in?” she said. “Why, is our money square?”

«But this is the last dance!» he was the room manager, and in the meantime the cloakroom manager and also the cashier had approached.

In the meantime, Lello had moved forward to warn of the movement. In the room the last couples were dancing: the orchestra was playing a tango, and the light was dark red. Making his head into the room, Lello shouted to the conductor, in the other corner, at the back: «Play for me, Jonny Guitar!»

Then he came back, shouting: “Well, shall we not go in then?”

«Guys, it's over now!» he was the head of the shop with a mustache down from the body shop. Lello was overcome by a fit of nerves. He took out two bags and threw them on the cloakroom counter: “Let's take a flat rate,” he shouted, “shall we?” and without waiting for him to answer, he entered the room, with the others following him, all stung to the uterus. The room manager and the other cronies went after them, biting them. Lello went to ask a blonde to dance, a little slut huddled in a corner. She was about to tell him no, but the tango ended: one of his companions arrived, with the dancer, and all three took up and left.

The light changed: the normal light came on with only red lights here and there, and everyone was preparing to act beautiful. Some had already put on their caps, some calmly went to get them and to do their last dance they placed them on some little chair.

The companions wandered here and there, through the long, narrow room. Shitter had sat down on the platform and had taken off a shoe that hurt. Ugo had headed towards the orchestra, at the back. This really started the last dance. It was a rumba that started off normal and then got louder and louder, going so fast that you couldn't keep up with it: most of the couples stopped dancing and crowded towards the exit: only three or four fanatics remained on the platform, spiraling up to the end, which seemed to have the San Giusto ball. The rumba ended, and they too went laughing towards the exit.

Ugo had barricaded himself in front of the orchestra, and as it closed, he was all cheerful: «Aòh, play the Comparcita!»

The players walked away, puffing out their necks and with a buttery smile in their pale eyes, nodded yes, and began to put away their instruments.

Ugo immediately got angry: «Aòh», he shouted, pulling his mouth so hard that it broke, «I'm not joking, you know!»

«A moretto», said the boss calmly, calmly and conciliatorily, «we're losing it, we're sleepy!»

Ugo turned towards his companions and gave a whistle to the painter: they immediately came, followed by the head of the room.

«Alla», said Ugo, pointing his index finger with his thumb raised towards the orchestra, and quickly moving his hand as if to say no, «don't we play for us?»

«A more», said the boss again, «we are paid!»

Ugo turned towards the head of the room, winking like a one-eyed man: "How much does this beggar give you?" he shouted.

«We are the ones from the unions!» shouted the Fool, laughing.

«In short, there is no talk here: do you want to play for us?» Ugo shouted.

The boss looked at him seriously, in the balls of his eyes. "A moreeee..." he said, as if he were saying: "They're good, can't you see that he's not okay?"

Lello intervened: "Why don't you want to play?"

But Ugo pushed him away with one hand and came forward, shouting: "We'll pay you, you know, in mandruconi!"

«Okay», he frowned, «but there's no sound inside the room, it has to close by now!»

«There are holes!» Ugo shouted, as if he were singing.

«Here, drink!» Shitter slurred, putting the half-full witch's bottle out of his pocket: the master looked at it, took it and, under Shitter's satisfied gaze, drank a swallow. The others also took out the half bottles that were left and offered them to the whole orchestra.

«But doesn't he call you mom?» said the mustachioed head of the room, "but don't you have to go to sleep?"

«To Baffò», said Ugo, «I'll buy all of this orchestra!»

No sooner said than done, he made money, a nice bundle of money, sacks, with a few reds in the middle. The boss gave a swipe.

"Well," Ugo shouted to him, "yes, it's for me, I'll make you laugh for a month!"

"Aòh", he nodded, "a sonata if you can do it! What the hell, though!"

«And where!» said Lello.

Immediately everyone went towards the exit, dancing and singing.

At the door Ugo turned towards the big moustachioed man, with his hands like a funnel around his mouth, and shouted: «Find a cave, orchestra, this one is booked!»

They resurrected in the street, with the one with the accordion, the one with the guitar and the one with the cornet behind them. First they drank some more, passing the bottles around, then the musicians started "Thank you for the flowers", while the holy six had another drop of water on the pavement. Then they began to go up the empty street, dancing with each other, making figures. «Come on», Ugo shouted to the musicians, «we'll pay you by the mileage!»

Those came out on the spot, already a little cooked too. As they finished "Thank you for the flowers", Lello said: "To musicians, to Lello you must make him feel like a prisoner!" «What a prisoner!» said Ugo contemptuously, "let me hear Viper!"

Salvatore stopped dancing with the Fool, and shouted: «What are they doing, you? What, are you poisonous? But I'll give you a song that will make you all drool!" He raised a finger at the four-eyed guitarist: "Twenty years old," he said.

«The electric chair!» Lello shouted.

«And it doesn't break er ca.... a drunkard", shouted Ugo, already pissed off, and turning ferociously to the musicians: «I said Vipera and Vipera has them!»

«Faje Lizard, to this idiot!» Lello said indignantly. «Come on, Prisoner, it's a song of life!»

Ugo showed his teeth like a rabid dog: he bent towards the orchestra which was almost touching the pavement with its spoon, crawling along it like a snake: «Vipera Sonate», he ordered.

Lello began to lose his calm, he narrowed his eyes, twisted his mouth, raised his index finger and with that said no no: "No, why?" said he, "I'm a prisoner!"

In the meantime, Salvatore had given up on twenty years of age, and very cheerfully, screaming like a siren, he began to sing on his own and dance to «Lola, Lola!»

Then the orchestra took advantage and forcefully played the Charleston, and everyone, holding each other's dirty hands and turning this way and that, started dancing to it. Dancing the Charleston in full force, some

together and some alone, they arrived in lace at Via dei Santi Quattro, in the square of San Giovanni. Here Ugo, all at once, let out a rush... hi-hat and all and ran towards the obelisk, standing on top of the pedestal.

He spread his arms, raising his eyes to the sky, like Saint Francis on that other side of the square, and shouted: «Behold the glories of Rome!»

Then he began to sing with his throat going up and down, pointing to the sky:

To win you need Mussolini's lions armed with valor...

But he stopped immediately, his face darkening and his teeth gnawing: "Because," he shouted, "we stole this obelisk from the Russians, you bastards! If we can, let us allow them to be overbearing, because! Assholes! Nobody gives a damn about us...! This is the Eternal City!»

He caught his breath a little, and then shouted desperately: «Plebeiii! The black bag is over! Now they give bread without stamps! Now you have to dig the bread out with the claw!... Before, my father brought it, the bread, but you all know, that they murdered my father... in front of the door of my house... And, having been there for stayed until the morning, with three revolvers in his forehead... Who helped him? Nobody, you pig...! In Italy there are fifty million inhabitants, and we all have wet asses!"

He had shouted so loudly that he closed his eyes and seemed to be about to get upset: instead he shouted even louder: «To De Gasperiii!»

He was silent for a while, then he let out a long, never-ending raspberry, drooling bits of saliva, with a sinister noise, bending over with his hands on his belly. Once the raspberry was over, he gathered his strength once again to shout, white as a dead man, to the musicians: «Let's start the March on Rome!»

At that moment the Fool, also half dead from the fatigue of dancing the Charleston with Tommaso, turned his eyes around the square of San Giovanni as if he realized he was there at that moment, and fixed them in one point, on a building at the at the entrance of Via San Giovanni in Laterano, and little by little everything lit up due to the beautiful surprise.

«Aòh», he shouted, «stop, stop, here is my lady!»

Then he looked around as if to make sure, overcome by some doubts.

“But isn't this where they put the dead?” she asked.

«Sine», said Shitter, who had rushed behind the curbstone where Ugo was holding the rally, «it's the morgue, where they put the dead who die in the hospital!»

The Fool lit up again with satisfaction: "Then stay here, my commare", he shouted, "because she died yesterday evening".

He was silent for a moment, then, facing the grates of the morgue at the end of the square, he shouted: "A commareeee!" And then again: «To commareeee!» "She's dead," he said.

"But what nonsense," said Shitter, "she died of lust!"

Not content with calling her, the Fool whistled at her with two fingers in his mouth.

"What, are you waiting for me to answer?" said a musician.

«Let's sing the serenade!» Salvatore shouted. Without waiting any longer the Fool took off running towards the morgue. The others ran after him, laughing, dragging the musicians behind them. From under the windows of the morgue the Fool turned towards the musicians, who arrived all strapped in, white with tiredness and fear.

«Attack, Totare!» she shouted, "I'll handle this!"

He turned towards the windows and began to sing, also spitting out whole drops of saliva due to the passion he put into it:

*The last serenade
it's not for you, the last serenade
what's wrong...*

«Sonatas!» Ugo, black, ordered the musicians who were dying. These, after a moment of indecision, began the accompaniment, and the Fool was able to move forward triumphantly, accompanying himself with the gestures of his arms, as if he were on stage at the Ambra Jovinelli:

*I want to make the little blonde up there feel it,
I want to improvise it
to those who have been waiting for me for a year or more...
The last serenade...*

At that moment, three or four nocturnals on bicycles were seen at the top of the square coming up from the gardens of Porta San Giovanni.

Shitter is the first to make faces at her. "Dattel!" she shouted, "there's a parade!" and he began to head down towards Via Merulana.

«Here's the charge!» Tommaso shouted, running after him. Everyone ran away, and, since the opportunity had presented itself, they soaked up the musicians, who couldn't run much because of the instruments, by playing yellow.

Rome was finally sleeping. Only the noctule remained to make the light clear, light so to speak, because the dark clouds piled up thick and stormy between the cornices and in the squares. Christmas was approaching, and the weather was getting really bad. As they arrived at a sweet spot, the friends said goodbye, and those from Trastevere went off on their own, taking Shitter with them, who couldn't take it anymore, with that shitty soul he had.

Instead Lello and Tommasino took the road home.

There wasn't really much walking, either to Piazza Vittorio, or to San Lorenzo, secondly: because you wanted so much before the trams started passing. They went along Via Emanuele Filiberto, and when they arrived at Piazza Vittorio, they went towards the gardens all splashing around, and sat down on two benches one after the other. Lello had his feet on one side, and Tommasino on the other, so the two heads were close together, although they couldn't see each other's faces.

Kiosks, toilets, journalists, everything was closed. Nobody passed. The street lamps among the trees twinkled of their own; only in a small corner of the square, down there, among a few fake rocks, there was a tribe of cats, of all kinds, who were wandering around, every now and then starting to hiss like forges. Tommasino and Lello were all thick and thin: they had hustled around with their hands clasped under their heads, their legs spread wide and their rabble-rousers in the air.

So, just for the sake of doing something, they began to talk about the old days, when they were young bulls, and life was all rosy since even now, in short, they were growing crops.

But they soon got tired of all this nice chatter, they started yawning, arguing a bit, and finally they took a nap.

The night slowly passed. When they woke up and stood up on the wet gravel, it was already almost five in the morning, and they began to hear the first trams.

All grouchy, with his mouth running out of laughter, Lello stretched, looked at Tommaso and said: "What if we walk a little bit further to Tomà?" "Holy shit," said Tommaso cheerfully, "aren't you tired of walking yet?" «And who is tired?» said Lello, starting to cut down Piazza Vittorio.

Those with little carts began to arrive: one was pulling between the poles, like a slave, and another was skipping behind, with the cecagna, all well combed and looking as if he had just come from the hairdresser. Like ghosts, they passed quickly over the wet pavement, and disappeared down the sidewalks around the gardens of the square.

In a corner you could hear some thunder. They were the basket workers, against the porches, who rolled the garbage cans and loaded them onto the truck.

Lello wasn't sleepy now, and he felt all light-headed, like when, towards morning, you leave the dance a little drunk. He went down under the arcades, with his hands in his pockets, his chest out and the face of a slut's pussy.

Tommasino, very happy with his friend's good disposition, pedaled behind him, also energetic, but, so as not to give him too much satisfaction, a little stooped.

«Kill Le'!» she asked him, "what, do you have fire under your feet?"

Lello didn't answer. He laughed a little, and he walked without turning. He knew anyway that his friend spoke like that only because he had a mouth: and if he babbled at him, it was because he was in too good a mood, and basically he was paying him a compliment: as if he were saying to him, Filone: "Kill, in Le 'What a pussy you are! But what, do you never get tired? What, are you a bersajere?"

He was singing a song, swinging his head a little, with his eyes fixed forward, and his hands in his pockets, as if he had tied them there.

They met a noctule coming home, then a worker white from sleep who was going to the Lazio railways, then an old man with a beard, who was pushing a wheelchair full of wet rags and other stinky inconveniences. But one passed separately from the other, each on his own, frozen, in silence. You could hardly even hear the sound of scuffed shoes on the wet floor of the porches.

They left Piazza Vittorio, and took Via Lamarmora, with the barracks and the milk factory, from where came a whole racket of iron crates full of bottles, dragged across the floors of the warehouses and loaded onto trucks.

They sat down a bit in front of the Ambra Jovinelli to look at the posters for the next day's film and the photographs of the variety artists.

"My soul!" Lello said in full force, biting his lips, in front of the poster where there was a half-naked blonde, who, turning her face over her shoulder, looked at it with a slutty smile that never ended.

Immediately dressed, Lello remained there for a while looking away, with his hands inside the pockets of his tight trousers, affixed.

A tram could be heard creaking on the Piazza Vittorio side.

«Vàjece, a Le'!» Tommaso then shouted, taking a running start.

Whistling like villains, they turned the corner of the Anibra Jovinelli, and, at full speed, took Via Principe di Piemonte, along the tracks of the Centocelle tram. They arrived at the arch of Santa Bibiana. They were so tired that they couldn't breathe, but not even the smell of trams.

«Fuck..., to Puzzi!» Lello shouted, bending at the waist to breathe better. «Aòh, what did I know», replied Tommaso trying to appear as unconcerned as he could, «what did I know, it was the 12th or the 11th!»

Lello sat down on the edge of the sidewalk. He stretched out his legs and leaned his back against the rubble of the wall. «Now when do you rent, here!» he made a grimace: but he immediately resigned himself, his face brightened, and, hurled onto the pavement, he began to sing again.

Tommasino sat down next to him, leaning against the wall, a little hunched over and numb, with his hands in his pockets and his legs crossed.

He felt satisfied with life, indeed almost sated, and while waiting, all he could do was yawn a little.

Lello stopped singing for a moment, and with his mouth tight because he wanted to laugh at the joke he had in mind, he said: "Who can remember these two beggars here!"

He swallowed bitterly, cheerfully, and resumed singing. He was a little uncomfortable, but the position he had taken was too much toga, it seemed to him, and he didn't want to change it.

There was the Apollo cinema in front, also with its posters, soaked, behind metal screens, and, above the door, written in half-metre letters, the titles of the films.

All along Via Cairoli where they had come to the bend, because, even though there wasn't a stop there, the tram always slowed down, there wasn't a single unfortunate person to be seen. It seemed like the city of the dead. And even worse on the other side, along Via Principe di Piemonte, with the

Centocelle tramway railway embedded under the white wall of the Termini station, and above a sort of minaret, all surrounded by a spiral staircase, and many rows of lights. There was the Santa Bibiana underpass, which dripped like a washer: a row of streetlights on the peeling roof, and the tram rails that entered it, for San Lorenzo and the Verano.

There was no one at all. It seemed that instead of becoming day, it had become more night: that everyone had gone back to bed, leaving squares, streets, avenues, underpasses in that darkness in which the municipal lighting shone aimlessly, illuminating the shiny pavements like daylight. sticky water.

You could only hear a few trains whistle, above the embankments of Termini station, beyond the wall. And, since there were no houses up there, you could clearly see the whole sky, still overcast: but it wasn't clear whether certain dark banners were pieces of clear sky or clouds heavier with rain.

It was a sky that really had no end: whitish and a little red. Since it was morning, a cool wind had risen, freezing everything, and for this reason it wasn't raining, and everything was clear and clean. But that red that covered the piles of clouds did not appear to be whether it was the reflection of the night lighting of the city, which extended for kilometers and kilometers on both sides, or whether it was, by now, a bit daylight.

If it was day, it was barely so, so little that it was worse than if it were night: a little reddish or yellow breath from the farthest edges, those suspended beyond the outskirts, beyond the villages, beyond the first countryside, which hung over the 'rural or on the hills – was slowly starting to light up the clouds. It seemed that it was blowing up from the corners facing the north of the city, where some drunk had pissed or vomited there two or three hours earlier, which was as if a hundred years had passed, or that it was blowing up from far away, from the beaches of Anzio or Fiumicino.

"Darnit!" Tommaso was disgusted because he had developed an attack of cecagna so strong that he was almost crying. But he stuffed the bacon in his pocket, and so he consoled himself. Lello had finished singing: and he had also changed position. He was crouched down on the pavement, resting his elbows on his knees and holding his face on his fists. Every now and then, absentmindedly, he gave a patient yawn.

«Damn you about this eleven», Tommasino said again, gritting his teeth, «but who has lost his way, has he?»

But just at that moment, as if sent by God, on the corner of Via Cairoli and Piazza Vittorio, down there at the end, a tram started scraping at the turn, with a gniiiiu gneeeu that made the skin curl. And the eleventh appeared, completely empty.

The two jumped up like two beasts. "Load! The tram leaves at the whistle! Ale!" Tommaso shouted scathingly.

Lello continued to act indifferent. As the tram reached the Apollo point it slowed down, to turn and enter the arch of Santa Bibiana. Tommasino rushed forward, grabbed onto the handrail, and, hopping onto the running board, entered the car, all bully, ready to kick up some dust with the delivery boy, who, as there was no one there, was standing in front next to the buddy who was driving. But suddenly, with a screech that made the bones sweat, the car braked so hard that Tommaso was thrown against the deliveryman's back. «Aòh, but what is it?» he shouted. The driver already had his hand on the knob, the front door opened and he jumped off the tram. Tommasino followed him, with a leap, and found himself on the road, there in front of the arch of Santa Bibiana. Lello was sitting on the ground, on the soaked pavement, next to the tram tracks, at the height of the trailer. His back was turned to Tommasino and the two tram drivers who got out of the car in front: the trailer deliveryman was already next to him, and was standing and watching him. Lello stood there, with his back stiff and his legs long forward. One hand held her against the wet cobblestones, the other held her up in front of his eyes. Seen from behind, it looked as if he had picked up something from the ground and was looking at it carefully. Tommaso ran next to him. What Lello was observing was his hand: but reduced to such a state that Tommaso, looking at it, became white as a rag and began to tremble. It was a small, mangled pile of bones and blood. Lello, trying to scream, but in reality with a fine voice, which seemed to come from another world, and it wasn't him who was speaking, said: "Oh my God, help!" Even his foot was jagged: the shoe, the flesh, the bones all formed a red mush of blood.

The delivery man and the driver were now there, and they were leaning over Lello: they looked and didn't move, like the other; he had put his hands against his face and could no longer remove them, so as not to see. Then some here, some there, other people had come: in a few minutes a group

formed around the stopped tram. Someone tried to take Lello under the arms and drag him towards the sidewalk. But Lello began to shout louder: then they left him there still, sitting on the pavement, with his hand raised and his leg stretched out.

Two or three basket makers, younger, ran away to go and make a phone call, to a bar, or to the shed at the Centocelle tram terminus. Meanwhile, around Lello, by now, the walls of the wet houses, the walls of the station, the faces of the people, the cobblestones, everything had cleared up, almost white, in the first light of the day, which was reappearing the same as always, little by little, on the city.

3. IRENE

It was a nice after lunch, a little before Easter: with a warm sun and a still fresh wind that made the skin chap.

At the end of the marana, next to the sewer, Tommaso stood up, pulled up his trousers, and fastening his belt and saying the dead against the gravel and chocks, began to climb the escarpment.

His shoes were all covered in mud, stinking black: it seemed like he was coming up from the hole of some volcano, with a little water at the bottom, this too black: around, among carpets of aquatic grass and mould, some frogs were already hobbling along, calmly, as if they were in the middle of the countryside, and even some insects, there were, here and there, some first little insects with wings, of spring.

Tommasino reached the top with his shoes all full of gravel, and, feeling stiff, he sat down and took them off. He cleaned them while singing, put them back on, and began pedaling in the direction of the Seven Churches.

He passed along Viale Cristoforo Colombo docilely and entered the esplanade towards Garbatella. It was an esplanade almost a kilometer long, with a few broken walls in the middle, all around rows of newly built buildings, six or seven stories high, and with buildings only on the longest side, on Via Maria Adelaide Garibaldi: they played football there very little. a hundred kids.

Tommaso got involved: it seemed like it was already Easter Monday, with everyone screaming and having fun. There were also those who didn't play football, the little ones, about two or three years old, with little hats and rompers, and certain fine faces, just like those of their bigger brothers.

Tommaso, however, didn't even see all that pipinara. He passed through there for one reason only: that is, to take a look at the meccas that he had glimpsed in the distance.

In fact, there were several of them, all over the meadow, keeping the puppets at bay, some very small too, some others already almost young ladies, all dishevelled, dressed for home. They sat in rows or in circles in the middle of the esplanade, taking care not to have anything to share with the males, of any age, who were messing around there.

They sat on the dry grass or on the trampled earth, swept by the giannetta, as women usually sit, that is, with the ghegano on the ground, and their knees, tightly pressed together and covered by their skirts, both

resting on one side. However, chatting and kissing, sometimes, as they changed positions, or as they got up to slap each other or play some joke, they let their skirts go wherever they wanted, and something underneath could be seen.

This is why Tommaso pedaled stealthily along the esplanade, leaving aside the practice matches, and only passing by the groups of females, chasing them. They pretended not to see him at all, but immediately realized that he was leering at them. Then they started joking more beautifully, or laughed wildly, without looking at him in the face: and they let him look underneath, how they moved, so much so that they didn't even notice that he was there. And then he was alone, and there were many of them. Tommasino walked, one slice after another, swallowing bitterness.

«Damn them, these filthy women!» she slurred and twisted her mouth.

He was really horny as he reached the end of the esplanade. Here, behind a road that then entered between the Garbatella buildings, there was still an open space, without any more women, and Tommaso then, red as a chanterelle, was already about to take it and go back, among the animals. When, this is how fate sometimes is, right at that moment the dog catcher's car emerged from the Cristoforo Colombo: it passed in front of the pile of donguanelles, took Via Anna Maria Taigi, and stopped in front of a large building a little higher.

All the kids, shouting loudly, ran after him, followed by the bigger ones, who were also curious like monkeys. Other kids had already run from the courtyards around there, and a whole crowd of brats formed in front of the door. Among these, however, there were also some little girls this time, all coiffed like the actresses, with their hair falling straight or in a ponytail over their sweaters.

Tommaso, seeing them, approached, while in the meantime the boss had entered quickly and walked down the long, narrow courtyard, among the lots.

Acting indifferent, Tommaso placed himself in the middle of the chaos of pipelletti, right behind two three dirty women, who, keeping themselves curled up, stretched their necks towards the courtyard.

Slowly, pretending to also look towards the courtyard, he approached the eldest, keeping his hands in his pockets, and with his knuckles behind the threadbare and light fabric of his trousers, he began to pat him a little: she immediately noticed , and began to make eyes at the mashed potatoes,

looking partly towards the courtyard, and partly towards the street, with certain jerks of the head, ticking on one side, ticking on the other, which seemed like those of a hen when pecks on the ground. The ponytail flapped this way and that, straight, over the red collar. With the excuse of looking towards the street, she took a few glances behind Tommaso, who was standing there, limp and blunt, with his knuckles straight, but as if he didn't even exist, he was made of air, like the angels.

The little sun, from the middle of the sky, softly illuminated the building. There it was sheltered from the air, and everything, from the sidewalks to the little trees between the lots, was golden and warm.

Five minutes passed, ten minutes passed, a quarter of an hour passed. The boys had started playing and hitting each other again. Conversations were born among the passers-by who were there in the crowd. The mines laughed like rolling pins, holding each other together with their hands, or rubbing their cheeks all affectionately. The others had also noticed that Tommaso was patting his older friend, the redhead with the ponytail, and the more they laughed, the more Tommaso got annoyed.

When finally, something appeared, at the end of the courtyard, next to the stone hoes for laundry and the dry flowerbeds. It was a small group that was coming forward at a marching pace: at the head was the boss with his assistant, behind them were two beautiful fardones, with black zinals, all walking around excitedly. The capoccia held in his hand something like a fishing line, long, just like the ones fishermen use on the Tiber: but instead of the wire, a strip of leather hung from the top.

At the other end of this strip was attached, by the neck, a funny little thing that came trotting forward, tick-tick-tick-tick on little cricket legs.

It was a little black dog, very small: a mongrel, all curly, with tufts of black curls on its paws. He was forced, with the two meccas behind him, to walk quickly, every now and then taking a jog to keep up with the bad guy: and sometimes, hanging from that sort of line, he would walk a few meters off the ground, like a little fish.

As soon as the group arrived in full force in front of the entrance, all that could be heard from the crowd of people waiting there was laughter.

«An see!» the kids screamed, all amused, rather than disappointed, at the sight of that little boy arriving.

The dog, seeing all those people waiting for him at the exit, and all those eyes focused on him, had a moment of uncertainty. He stood still,

looking around, with one paw raised. But a tug of the line lifted him bodily, and he had to resume his march, running, with his little legs moving so quickly that they could almost not be seen.

However, despite everything going so badly, he continued to look around, and indeed, he even fixed his eyes on the people who were waiting for him: but it was clear that he felt ashamed, with those big black eyes that, among the fur, they glittered at him, looking here and there. And he tried to hide his shame and his mortification by taking on an almost cheerful air: it seemed that he was smiling at the people who were looking at him, to show that nothing bad was happening to him, but that in fact he was almost happy.

He passed like this, half strangled by the leather strip, through the audience, all stiff and wagging.

Only when he got close to people's feet could it be seen that his back was completely mangy, with pieces of gray and mangy skin, among a few sparse tufts of black curls.

The bad guy almost made him fly to the van, where the other prisoners were scratching their paws against the wall and breathing loudly.

The pickup put it into gear and took off. After a while, almost everyone, laughing, had gone away: the boys to the esplanade, the girls to the sidewalks around there, under the house, in the sun.

But the two meccas who had followed the dog still remained there at the door.

Tommasino, more and more tapestry, and coughing with emotion, approached and leaned against the wall, with one foot against the disfigured wall and one hand in his pocket.

The two sat there chatting, all happy, calmly, as if their mothers were waiting for them at home, and they enjoyed the sun and the open air.

"Such dirty things!" Tommaso thought again, looking at them with disgust, all congested.

One was a little girl, black like an African, with straight hair, two small, pointed tits under her summer blouse, and a low, firm bottom that almost reached her heels. But this Tommaso didn't even delude himself when he looked at her. She was too petite and knowledgeable: for him, she had spotted him right away, that other one was fine, who was also a short girl, but big, robust, almost like a boy, with her hair curled by a perm, which was tall and as if plastered all around the red and square face.

The two of them had immediately noticed Tommaso: but they didn't bother him at all. They were standing there, chatting like women do. The little African girl was telling the other about the phone call that a friend of her cousin's boyfriend had made to her the day before, and about the phone call that she had made the same morning, reporting the conversation to her cousin's mother. Tommaso was all crazy, and she was talking, talking about her: the other girl looked at her a little in the face, and turned her eyes around her a little. Even the one she spoke to, as she spoke, occasionally glanced towards the road, with a jerk of her head like chickens do.

Since they were in the house as they were, a little light and bedraggled, they were shivering from the cool air.

The African had a cold, but she seemed completely satisfied with her closed and somewhat dry voice, which came out of her blocked nose with red nostrils. Her other sister, Irene, listened to her half-frozen, keeping her elbows tightly against her sides, her arms against her tits and her hands clasped. She was slightly bent forward and curled up, with her head between her shoulders, her toes both turned inwards, her thighs together and her belly pulled back. Tommaso, silent as a cell, took a cigarette out of his pocket, lit it calmly, and began to smoke in slow, measured puffs.

The two were a little anxious, laughing, rubbing their hands on their shoulders and tits, because of the coolness they felt. While they were chatting, a mandrucon passed along the street, with her hair stretched out like a broomstick, and as thin as she looked on Friday. The two of her greeted her by shouting and pulling almost past the gate: "Hello, Celè!" She returned her greeting, seriously, from afar. And they were even happier and more naughty: "What, can you give me a kiss, Celè?" the African girl shouted. But hers continued on for the hell of it, dark-faced, sketching.

It was a good time. Taking slow and calm puffs of smoke, Tommaso moved away from the wall and took a step towards the two girls.

«What, was that dog yours?» he asked, serious and interested.

The two looked at each other. «And, about her», said the little African. Irene became even redder in the face, and she started laughing. "Why?" she said.

"What, was it hydrophobic?" Tommaso inquired.

"None, I was coming with a scab", answered Irene.

Tommaso was silent for a while, looking at her: but then he immediately continued, very politely: "Kill him, and how did he manage to pijalla?"

"I don't know," she said, "he was always carrying my little brother around, and if he's going to be killed by someone else!"

She spoke tightly, vibrating, while the other, who had spoken so much, was now mulling in silence, from below.

Tommaso and Irene started talking, making some observations about dogs, the advantages and disadvantages that they bring into the home: she had the fresh experience of Fido, and Tommaso had met many dogs in the suburbs.

«Eh», said Tommaso, «we often become fond of dogs, like one of the house! I had a dog when I was little: but then it grew too big, and then my mother gave it to a wine-carter! It's true, she won't believe it, I started crying that day!"

«Ah yes, yes!» Irene confirmed, "and then dogs are intelligent!" «Many times», she added, «certain people live more than there should be in this world! They should take those guys over there to the dog catcher!

"Unfortunately, that's exactly how it is!" said Thomas.

All of a sudden, meanwhile, the little African had become serious and hasty, tapping her feet on the ground a little as if to warm them up inside her low-cut slippers. She said: «To Irè, I greet you, you know... »she had really made a definitive decision, she could see it, and it was useless to argue.

"What are you leaving?" said Irene, just to say. The little African made a small bow, bending on her right knee and jerking her other leg back a little: «No, gabirai!» she said, «I'm here! With everything there is to do on gasa!»

She was almost spiteful and annoyed. But she immediately changed her tone, and she became all confidential and nice again, despite her hurry: "Hello, Irè", she said, "let's see more later!"

All proud of her cold voice and the rush she had, she took off running and pulled her butt, low and thick, behind her, throwing out her legs like women do when they run, which seem to separate from her body, and holding his arms with his elbows against his sides, like a pair of plucked little wings: it took him half an hour to reach, with that run, the pavement at the end of the courtyard and disappear inside the door of a lot.

Tommaso put the cigarette now reduced to a coal to his mouth. He kept his other hand in his pocket, abandoned, half in and half out, red and yellowish like a core. He went back to talking about dogs: «What, would

you like a dog's den, gentlemen? If you want it, there's a friend of mine in Pietralata who has half a dozen puppies: they're beautiful dogs, you know! Of race!»

«Less pain!» she did the other, half squealing, as if a little offended, thrusting her tits forward. «Don't let me hear from my brother and my father, until they really take it away, you damn dog! I don't really care about anything, but about nothing at all, about the dogs! They only do things for you, they always climb into your beds... they make the house dirty... And then they swindle!"

She spoke like a little girl who says things to spite another: her face was all on fire, from the impulse: "What do you mean, a dog?" she continued. "No worries, that's what it is!" Like her, she was left speechless due to her too much conviction, and she pressed her ass against her throat, shaking her head no no.

Then Tommaso had a stroke of genius: seeing that the dogs were now at peace, he looked at her laughing with his round and greasy little face, and observed thoughtfully: «Yes, it wasn't that I came here, to Garbatella, to my friend, and I didn't stop to watch the kids play football, and then there wasn't any dog catcher, when the two of us would have met?"

He was satisfied with this philosophical consideration: he didn't say, it was normal, that he had stopped at the esplanade to look below at the girls, and not at the boys playing football.

He didn't even think it was appropriate to say who his friend was, who he had come to visit, and who was a certain Septimius Augustus, a judge who lived in the new houses behind Cristoforo Colombo: every now and then he gave him a hand bring the cart, thus earning some money: and on purpose, he didn't talk about it with her, because with those four money he had in his pocket, he had already prepared the whole program.

"Why?" said Irene at the end of Tommaso's philosophical speech, acting naive, the good girl from home who knows nothing about these things, and doesn't even think about it.

Tommaso let her do it, because he too was being a good boy. "Because it's?" she said, «aòh... have you ever seen fatalities, how they are...»

Faced with the phenomenon of fatalities, Irene had no choice but to remain silent: but by being silent, all full of energy, she wanted to say two things: «Well? and what about this?" and at the same time: «I know it, I know it!»

In short, she really didn't want to go too far: Tommaso, for his part, took a step closer to her, with his face all dyed red, on the squeaks. He stared fixedly, his eyes narrowed like two small cuts from the smile that swelled his jaws under the grease. Looking at her like that, he asked, as if he were asking just for the sake of asking, disinterested: "What are Garbatella doing this evening?"

«Er Quovadissee», Irene said quickly, as if happy to give good news.

«Good job, dammit!» he said, competent, and equally happy to receive news on the right.

He was silent for a moment, his smile growing and becoming more like a parable: "Why don't we smoke together tomorrow, since it's Sunday?" he asked, trying, since Irene must have already expected it anyway.

Irene's face darkened, she made a sort of curtsy, also very serious, sullen and almost severe: "I can't," she said, almost sadly, alluding to certain facts, also fatal, in her life.

But for him to immediately say that he was coming was certainly impossible: this was something that was understood.

Tommaso, therefore, did not insist immediately: on the contrary, he showed himself to be understanding and expert in the things of life, someone who knows how difficult it is for a girl to have a little freedom, in the family, and towards people, neighbors.

He squeezed the stub between his fingers and, with a crack, made it fly away onto the sidewalk.

He dropped the subject of cinema and asked: "What, do you work, gentlemen?"

«No, I'm excited, you want to work!» Irene said sadly.

«Proper woman of the house, then!» said Tommaso, still being a good boy.

"Eh", said Irene.

«And what is he doing about his father?» Tommaso inquired, discreetly.

Irene frowned and said in a breathy, dignified voice: "City employee!"

Tommaso's eyes shone with happy surprise: «It's mine too!» he exclaimed. This thing united them even more, gave them more confidence, and they were both moved and happy.

«My brother also works», said Tommaso then, «as a tailor». «I», he added bitterly, «am suited to being a clerk. But I made my second start, in

Tiburtino, and now I hope to have a better place. I'm waiting for an answer..."

He was silent for a moment, wasting time lighting another cigarette: then smoking, he looked at her for a little while in silence, with the question he had to ask already painted on his face: "So... tomorrow?" she said, "nothing can be done about it..."

This time Irene immediately showed herself to be a little less negative: «Me sa de no», she said.

"And why?" Tommaso asked innocently.

Irene was lost in thought. Then she shook her head again: "No, no," she said.

"And why?" Tommaso asked us again, "if we see here, at the stop on the eleventh, we go straight to the cinema, what's wrong with that?"

"I don't know," said Irene, "it depends..."

"And since what?" Tommaso exclaimed, simple and naive like a little angel.

«You can wait for me, if you want», said Irene, «tomorrow, around four o'clock, there at the tram stop... It's because my father is going out... and that Negretta, my friend, is going to find your cousin in Alberone, then I can apologize to my mother... and maybe I can come to the show..."

Tommaso was all red with emotion: "I can just wait two hours", he said, "what does that have to do with it, as long as she comes..."

«Aòh», said Irene, pressing her cheek against her throat, «yes, I can come, until there she is...» But you could see she was coming. She too was gone all at once, like the little black girl before, serious, thoughtful and a little mysterious. "It's late now, I have to leave," she said. "Until we meet again!" and she stretched out her big, red hand a little awkwardly.

Tommaso understood, this time too, as a man of life, and did not insist.

"Goodbye," he said, shaking her hand, with a long look. So they separated and he watched her cross the courtyard as she ran away, but without running, all dignified, with her perm going up and down. As it turned out, realizing that he was watching her, she couldn't resist and took a little jog, pretending to be in a hurry to get home, and moving all over, ashamed of feeling herself being watched from behind, with her elbows a little worn. and worn-out shoes.

When he disappeared at the end of a corner, Tommaso took it and left, smoking, and putting his hands in his pockets with the air of a good woman.

He thought everything about the next day: and he had time to think about it, for more than two hours, until it was almost nightfall, because he had gone off to Tiburtina, to save the tram money.

The whole of Garbatella shone in the sun: the steep streets with little gardens in a row, the houses with sloping roofs and eaves with cooked dishes, the piles of brown buildings with hundreds of small windows and dormer windows, and the large squares with arches and porticoes of fake rock around. In one of these little squares, at the tram terminus, next to a priests' cinema, Tommaso was spitting nervously, all set, waiting for Irene.

This was already about ten minutes late, and Tommaso was babbling badly, casting evil glances around, especially towards the Via delle Sette Chiese, where the girl was supposed to come from: "What?" he thought indignantly, "does he punch me, does he do me?"

Under that beautiful sun, everyone had taken off, not only their coats, but their jackets as well, and they were walking around handsomely in their sweaters, with American-style trousers. They passed up and down in groups, or in twos or threes on a Vespa.

Tommaso, who hadn't even smelled the smell of his coat all winter, and in the bitterest cold had done his best with a dirty shawl around his neck, was now covered from neck to heels by a beautiful coat, really strong, with the low martingale, which he had borrowed from Alberto Proietti, that friend of the MSI students from Trastevere, who was now an accountant. Because Tommaso, despite living, respectfully speaking, at the bottom of the ranks of the starving, nevertheless had friends in high places. Partly for this reason, partly for the fact of the woman he was waiting for, he had a black sullen face, and he didn't look at anyone.

It came from above, creaking, on the eleventh, half empty, and stopped there, on the slope, in front of the little louse. Seven or eight people got out, and among these, Irene with her friend from the day before.

Tommaso turned red as a chili pepper, and came forward, sniffing nervously between one puff and another. Even the two donguanellas came towards him, quietly, with their mouths laughing a little. They politely shook hands to say goodbye. Once this was done, the little African, all set up, with a bag that reached the cleats of her shoes, immediately held out her hand again to take her leave. «I have to leave, you know!» she said a little awkwardly with a conspiratorial look. And she, having given her hand,

without anyone holding her back, she went on her towards the Largo delle Sette Chiese, lashing the air with her hair.

The two were left alone. Irene gave the usual swipe to fix the hair that was bothering her on her collar. She too was all bundled up: she was wearing a gray skirt and a light black wool t-shirt, tightly held together. Tommaso immediately got excited when he saw her. «Damn, what a monster!» he thought to himself, becoming even more red and grumpy.

«Do we want to go to Irene?» she said, with the act of walking towards Garbatella, which was about three hundred meters away.

Irene stood next to him: «Yes, my father can see me!» she said, rather than answering yes. They went step by step along the tram tracks. Thomas had some ideas about the issue of fathers. «First of all», he said, «elderly men don't go out for a walk in the suburbs! They hang out at the tavern, drinking a glass and playing a match!"

«Yes», said Irene, «but my father comes right this way, to the tavern, where his companions live in Piazza Pantero Pantera!»

«If only I could see», thought Tommaso, «that we would actually meet him, damn him!» He laughed: «Well, that's it», he said loudly, «even if we had to meet her! Mejo! So let's do these presentations and let's be at peace!"

«Yessss!» Irene said skeptically. Tommaso's whole speech was, in short, what men usually do to trap little girls. But Irene wasn't sleeping. And after she had said yes, a little mysteriously, she remained silent, with an expression between incredulous and bitter, as if she were saying: "yes, I'm sorry, I'm here, but I wasn't born yesterday!"

Tommaso preferred not to delve into it. «Now I'll work for you!» he thought, "with these 'zinnette you find yourself!" "Very cute," he said loudly, "his friend!"

«Yes, so cute!» said Irene complacently, a little posona.

"What's his name?" Thomas asked.

«Diasira», replied Irene, proud to have a friend with that beautiful name. "She is engaged!" she then added, again with the sly and at the same time a little bigoted laugh as before.

"Oh yes?" Tommaso said softly.

A deeper disbelief appeared on Irene's face: "With a boy from Tormarancio," she said.

Tommaso dropped the matter this time too, not asking for further clarifications about this boy from Tormarancio. But Irene instead continued:

«But he's not such a good boy! 'One week he works and one month he's out and about. Just yesterday he dominated! He knows that he really doesn't have the imagination to work! »

«Mmmmh», thought Tommaso, «what a complaint!» and then loudly: «Not all of them are lucky! You'll understand these times!"

A new silence full of skepticism and bitterness is engraved on Irene's features. But they had arrived in front of Garbatella, with the billboards bathed in beautiful sunlight. In the little square in front there was a little bar, and around it, about twenty young men. Tommaso became even more black in the face, and coughing, he guided Irene into her entrance, towards the cash register, placing his hands slightly protectively on her hips. Irene immediately took on a bemused and suffering look, as girlfriends do.

It remained like this for the entire time that Tommaso queued to get the tickets; then they went up into the gallery, without even sparing a glance at the starving people who were going to the stalls. But there weren't really that many people, most had already seen Quo Vadis in some first or second run cinema, especially the youngsters, because it was rare that someone hadn't made an appearance in it.

They entered the interval between the pieces and the film, and placed themselves in the front row, against the parapet, all huddled and supported. A bit of satisfaction was clearly painted on Irene's face as soon as the lights went out: she took a quick look at Tommaso, pushed her hair back with the usual pat, sat down on the chair, in short, it was clear that she was preparing to enjoy the film: and his good disposition increased when Tommaso called the bruscolinaro, who was about to leave, and bought fifty lire worth of bruscolini.

«An see!» Irene said kindly, between one note and another, reading the names of the actors, «there's also Leo Glinn!» Tommaso didn't even know who this Leo Glinn was. But Irene continued, swollen by her sympathy, gloating: "I really like the way he works." «And a good actor!» Tommaso admitted, consenting.

As long as the bruscolini lasted, that is, for almost the entire first half, Tommaso, with his hands and mouth occupied, watched the film, all well disposed, like Irene too. But as soon as the bruscolini were finished, the nervousness began: Irene stood there next to him, innocent as a dove, with certain zinnones that climbed over the parapet, and certain skirts that spread over the chair and shaved Tommaso's coat. Tommaso grimaced in disgust,

mentally, and, still mentally, he pulled his head back between his shoulders, as if he had been given a blow while thinking. «And, good thing, it is! Kill her, she's good!"

He began to hold his knee tighter against her thigh. She understood, she slipped it a little, but she let it go, because that was the minimum she could allow herself even without going against the innocent pleasure of enjoying the film. So, after a while, taking advantage of a scene of Christian martyrs, at the Colosseum, as if driven by a sudden outburst of affection, Thomas put his arm around Irene's shoulders, holding her close. She also sketched this, only becoming more serious and sullen, and continuing to watch the film with her eye twinkling, a little moved.

In the meantime Tommaso had become extremely horny: while he held Irene tightly with his left hand, he smoked nervously with his right hand: then, all of a sudden, for the first time in his life, he threw out a stub at least two centimeters long, and slowly He slowly took off his coat. "It's hot," he slurred, folding it carefully and placing it against his belly.

Then he put his arm back on Irene's shoulders, who, lost in watching how Leo Glinn worked, leaned a little towards him. With his arm on his shoulder, however, Tommaso didn't stay there for long. He detected it, and, this time, reached for Irene's hand and squeezed it in hers. She had a hand that looked like a man's, but was just as horny: Tommaso held her tightly, holding the back of his hand on one of her thighs, down towards her knee, and pressing on top of her.

«Caruccio, are you here?» said Irene, alluding to Saint Peter. «He works really well, you know! »

"It is light!" said Thomas. And, taking Irene's joke as encouragement, he moved the back of her hand a little further up her thigh.

But Irene, as if nothing had happened, pushed her hand back down towards her knee, taking Tommaso's tight one with her.

«But damn you!» thought Thomas.

«Oh God», said Irene, putting her other hand to her mouth, apprehensive for the fate of the Christians, ready to enter the arena to be torn to pieces.

«These aren't true stories!» said Tommaso, used to comforting himself like this. «It's cinema!»

«Less pain!» Irene said resentfully. «There are no true stories! What, er vancelo is 'a chat now'?"

«I don't know», said Tommaso hastily, because he didn't care about this fact, «these things must have really happened, but when? It will be almost a thousand years! »

“Mwell?” said Irene, but she was too impressed by the sight of the martyrs climbing the ladder singing church songs, and she remained silent.

Tommaso took advantage of the moment to push back the two clasped hands: but Irene resisted, even though she was completely engrossed in the film. "Oh yes?" Tommaso thought grimly, "now you're telling me the right thing, are you telling me?"

He began to get angry: he was really horny, and he was sprawled on the chair, with his knees against the balustrade, and so he had Irene's tits almost under his nose. Under the light wool t-shirt they were beautifully swollen and firm, ten kilos of Peruna flesh: Tommaso then removed his hand from Irene's again, and put his arm back around her neck, but this time he held her tighter, in so that with his fingers he reached the junction of the zinna on the shoulder. «Kill them», he said, pointing to the Christians, «they really believed in God, huh?»

"So!" she said, moved to hear Tommaso share her feelings. Tommaso pushed her fingers a little further down, and began to pass them over the flesh of her breast.

Then a father and a mother with four children, three boys and a girl, came to sit behind them: the girl had sat down right behind Irene.

«Damn them these Tarpanis!» Tommaso thought to himself, grinding his teeth. He had to stop with the movement of his fingertips, and withdraw his hand a little to his shoulder. Then he had to decide to take her hand back from underneath, on his thigh. And he had to settle for having his tits spread out four centimeters from the end of his nose.

Then, getting more and more angry, while seriously enjoying the film, especially since there was an entire family behind it, he began to try to move the two clasped hands from Irene's thigh to his. Irene resisted: she resisted two, three times. Tommaso began to get really pissed off. «What a bitch», he thought, «what do you think, that you found er gaggio?» And meanwhile he kept shooting. Finally, all at once, Irene gave in, and Tommaso was able to press his hand on her thigh. «To bitch!» he repeated to himself, "what, didn't you know you had to be there?"

Now that he had Irene's hand there on his thigh, he slowly began to pull her up: he had taken his other hand out of his pocket, and was holding it on

his coat, for greater protection, giving us a look. He had a brownish dress with white stripes, which suited him for the party, but it was old and almost stank by now: and so were the pedals, and the shoes, bought a year earlier by Zimmio, who had stolen them from a fagot. . But it was so dark and you couldn't see well. As the two hands were a little higher, towards the girth, Irene began to release hers. "What are you doing now?" Tommaso thought threateningly, without giving in, red from the effort, "what, are you thinking about it again?"

Irene continued to try to free her hand, stubbornly. Tommaso had to squeeze it with all his strength, and he almost didn't do it. When Irene got tired and released her hand, for a while Tommaso had to content himself with holding her still almost on his knee. They resumed calmly looking at the Quo Vadis for a while.

Meanwhile, the gallery had also slowly filled up, and now there were people even standing, packed together like sardines, with a nagging stench of sweat. One of the kids behind them, the smallest one, was crying, slowly, taking advantage of the fact that his father, yellow from the tropea, was asleep.

So, once an important scene had passed, now that an ancient Roman aristocrat was seen in her palace, with slaves playing the harps, Thomas began to try again.

Irene turned her head towards him and said: "Don't worry, stay still, Tomà!" "And why?" he said.

"Why not," Irene replied, and began to free her hand again.

"What the hell with you," thought Tommaso, furious, "I'm going to punch you in the face, now!" And loudly: «What's wrong with that, let's not do anything!»

«There,» she murmured, «be careful, I'm never going back with you, to the cinema!»

«What's wrong with that!» Tommaso asked us again, increasingly red from the effort he was making in holding her close, without moving too much. «What do I care», he thought, «if you never come back! Just because you came today, bitch! And now that you're at it, you, with Tommaso, don't do these tips, please!"

He squeezed her even tighter, making her crack the bones of that big hand she had. Irene grimaced in pain and stopped pulling. She stood still, looking at the screen, slumped over, her eyes shining.

«You understood it, yes?» thought the bastard Tommaso. And slowly he began to rub his hand, as he wanted: but that just didn't want to be there. «To Tomaso», he said, with a new tone, «I didn't believe you were like that! Yes, I knew it, I wasn't coming to the cinema!» and the zippemolle began again. Tommaso became a beast: «What harm do we do, for such stupidity!» he told her, almost screaming. And he pulled angrily, until his hand went where he needed to go. But Irene kept her all huddled up, pulling on the other side of her. «What a bad whore, the pussy of a cocksucker», thought Tommaso, who now felt that all his honor was at stake, «but why do you think that I paid you for the cinema? I'm three, you know, and that's not saying much!" «And give me some of this hand!» he added, with a new angry tear. «Three times», he said again, inside himself, furious, «but what do I know about you? Nothing? And why? Just look at your damn eyes, you're so cute!" «And I also paid you for the bruscolini», he thought, with a new burst of anger, «fifty lire! Fuck you...!"

He pressed his shriveled hand underneath.

"One minute," he said to her, "just one minute, I swear to my mother, she's dead!" But right at that moment he saw a kind of resignation in Irene's face and eyes: and then he added affectionately and a little cheerfully: "The man must have the same satisfaction as him, right?"

A little at a time, still watching the film, and as if it weren't her own, Irene released her hand to Tommaso, who said to her, this time loudly: «How good of you, Irè! Do you know that I really like you?" And then he also added: «To Irè, I love you, I'm not joking, I love you, I swear to you!»

Irene curled up on the chair, silent as a shadow, disconsolate in all parts of her body, from her ass to her tits and from her tits to her thighs, watching the film with her eyes shining with tears.

The Quo Vadis was quite long, and when it ended and Tommaso and Irene left Garbatella, it was already so dark that it seemed like the middle of the night.

The little bar in the square in front of the cinema glittered like a sparkler, with all its neon tubes, and the Garbatella around it was a mass of lights lost in the night. The cliques of young men had increased, and some astride a scooter was preparing to go into Rome, and some were returning, all shouting and doing the forty-eight.

Up the street where this time Irene and Tommaso turned, Via Enrico Craverio, everything was almost dark, with only the cracks in the windows

and a few headlights. They walked through the center, along a sort of herringbone pattern of earth in the middle of the crumbled asphalt, with a few small trees sprouting. Tommaso walked silently with his hands in his pockets, and Irene came a little behind, holding his arm. They walked silently, like old boyfriends, who have nothing to do with the rest of the people, all closed in their own thoughts, and they don't even have anything to say to each other, because everything is said, except for a few little words, psss, psss, yes, no, said with a thoughtful face, a little bitter and full of many unsaid things.

So they arrived at Piazza delle Sette Chiese, with two other little bars that glittered this time against the emptiness of the meadows, and at the end the immense shape of the hospital under construction and the lights of the Cristoforo Colombo: then they turned into an even darker street, without even the street lamps with fresh earthworks.

So every now and then they stopped to say those heartfelt words to each other, psss psss no, yes, and even a few kisses, but not many because Tommaso felt lighter, given that there had been what there should have been at the cinema. Thus, all together, they arrived in a hurry to the dark street, to the gardens of Piazza Sant'Eurosia, where, already in agreement, all heart and soul, they left each other: they gave each other the bet, in a low voice, they said each other just in half a breath hello, and Irene went down the gravel fence along the garden, lengthening her pace, and even doing a bit of a run every now and then.

Tommaso saw her go away, took out a straw and lit it, slowly going down towards the tram terminus, in a smart way.

All puffed up from his first Sunday spent with the mine, Tommaso arrived in Pietralata, and, as he arrived, Zimmìo and Shitter with two or three others of the gang stopped him, and asked him if he was willing to go with them for a free-range labor in Anguillara. Tommasino said: «Yes, why not?» It was already night and they left with a boast made by the others in the afternoon.

The raid of chickens in Anguillara went straight, and they did another the following day, in Tivoli, and then another in Villalba, and then another in Settecamini, ever closer. Then on Holy Saturday, without making much effort to go so far, they went to work at Ponte Mammolo, which was just a stone's throw away, behind the Aniene.

Jokes aside, that's how things went. Shitter, Zellerone, Cazzitini, Buddha, Gricio, Jackal and Nazzareno, together with the younger ones, Tommasino, Zimmìo and Zucabbo, who in the meantime had also become big, had gone to Tiburtino to rent a van. , because the work had to be done elsewhere, near Ciampino: it involved three to four quintals of bronze. It was raining. All wet to the core, the friends arrived in Tiburtino, and, in front of the window of a lot overlooking the countryside, they started whistling. Carlo the Deaf went out, under the covered entrance, but when they proposed to give him the van, he began to say no:

«No, no, no, I'm not giving it to you! I already know three times that I give the van, then they go blank, and I remain elm!"

«But we're not like those guys, anyway!» they did.

«Well», said Carlo the Deaf. «Give me the five thousand immediately, and I'll give you the van!»

«But we don't have it, five thousand lire!» said the companions.

He says: «So I'm sorry, Moretti, but the van isn't leaving!»

«Look», they urged each other, «are you sending us a blank, tomorrow is Easter, the day after tomorrow is Easter Monday, how do we do it, without a penny?»

"Come on, you too," proposed the Jackal, "if you don't believe it!"

«No, no», said Carlo, «I'm too stained, I'm going to play bingo, let's fix it!»

"We'll leave you your coat!" cried the Cagone.

"And what am I going to do, der cappotto", replied Carlo. "Tomorrow is Easter, I want to spend it peacefully, I don't want to stay awake all night thinking about the van!"

So in short, goodnight, goodnight, they had to leave empty-handed. Shitter, Zellerone, Jackal, Buddha, Gricio, Cazzitini and Nazzareno went to the Bar Duemila, there in front of Monte del Pecoraro, in Tiburtino. The other three youngsters remained on the street, in front of Charles the Deaf's lot, without deciding to move.

"There's nothing to do," Zimmio said dejectedly.

"What are you stupid about going to sleep?" said Zucabbo. «Damose da fa, let's face some trouble: the money must necessarily splash out!»

"But you know," said Tommaso, who was the most loving of all, ever since he got together with Irene, "that when you do work like this without any advice, it's easy to fall for it!"

«Tomorrow is Easter, I prefer to pass it to the shop, which is without a lira!» said Zucabbo.

«We can't even hang out», observed Zimmìo bitterly, «because it's raining, and who hung out the clothes on the terrace!»

They were silent for a moment, all dejected, and there was such silence around that you could only hear the rain falling.

And then a rooster was heard crowing: it was Charles the Deaf's rooster.

«Do we want to be a chicken farmer with a deaf guy?» said Zucabbo, his eyes shining. «Because he, this slut's son, didn't want us to rent the van, so he'd like it in his cu...!»

«Aòh, speaking of chickens», said Zimmìo, who, with Tommasino, still smelled of the thefts of free-range animals, «do you feel like coming with me? Now that they think about it, there at the church of Ponte Mammolo, among the priests, there is a chicken. I know where the chickens are: I went there to steal the egg a few years ago. Damn, they have a lot of them!»

“How many do they have?” Tommasino asked.

«Two three hundred!» Zimmio exclaimed.

«Let's go then, it's worth it», said Tommaso. «Half a sack each is one hundred and fifty brandons!»

«And then we put them on?» said Zucabbo, who had already left.

«I have the mattress cover», Zimmio said promptly, «my mother washed the wool, and do you want to put chickens in there. Let's even get a sexton!»

So, all hopeful, they set off. They went along Tiburtina, huddled in the rain, with all their hair soaked, and arrived after Fiorentini, in front of Zimmio's little house, set against a lawn, behind a garbage dump. Tommaso and Zucabbo waited outside, while Zimmio went into the house to get the necessary things: a thirty kilo trotter, a chisel and the blind. As he entered, however, he looked at the flask of wine on the bedside table, and began to suck one by one, swallowing one, and then another, and then another: and so he was half cooked, shaking.

With the irons rolled up inside the mattress cover, they returned to the Tiburtina, and quickly, they traveled the two or three kilometers to Ponte Mammolo. The road looked like a river, against the darkness of the countryside, while all around the horizon the lights of the villages shone.

After crossing the bridge over the Aniene, you continued forward a little further until you reached a pizzeria, and then you turned left onto Via Casal

dei Pazzi. There was still no lighting there, as in the whole village, which consisted of small, whitewashed houses, half built and half not, with a few skyscrapers scattered here and there. In the middle of Via Casal dei Pazzi, all white, there was the church, and next to it, the priest's house. On the other side of the road, all meadows and vegetable gardens, with the lights of Montesacro in the background.

Around the church and the priest's house there was a low wall. The three went around this, and went separately to the back, where the henkeeper was. The little road that ran alongside it between a river of mud, and the two or three pieces of new houses around it looked like ruins. It always rained. Zimmio went underneath with his trotter and chisel, while Tommaso gave him some light with his blind: Zucabbo had placed himself at the corner of the street at the end. The Zimmio beat hard, without worrying: a hole of about fifty centimeters soon made it happen. It was almost finished when a light came on from a stump of the house.

"Hold on, hold on!" Zucabbo came to say.

Zimmio didn't even look at him: «What the... what do you care!» he said, «that's Father der Bove, he's more of a thief than Ali Babbà. You can see he's empty, he's wearing the cue too!»

Zimmio knew all these things because he had the girl there in Ponte Mammolo, and he had been talking to her for more than a year.

«Then come on, go!» said Thomas.

As soon as the hole was finished, Zimmio turned to Tommaso: «Now that I've made a hole», he said, «I'll shoot a shot and you go in, because my head hurts from drinking all that wine!»

«But he's coming in, he's coming in!» said Zucabbo. «Come in, you're good at free-range animals! By the way, don't free-range people scream?"

«No», said Tommaso, «those don't scream: if it's dark they don't scream, no, of course turn on the light they scream, but in the dark they just do coco coco, slowly. And then they are Christian chickens, these ones, Catholic, as they say? I'm good!"

So Zimmio took it and went in, rubbing with his belly: as soon as he was on the other side, Tommaso got into the hole and followed him. As soon as they found themselves inside the gallinaro, they turned on the blind.

In the chicken shed there was a lot of straw, a couple of empty baskets and a copper hanger, but there wasn't even the smell of chickens. At the end

there was the gate with slats and a chain, and the other wall was made of empty holes.

«You guys», said Zimmio, «who are in this other little room next door. Can't you hear them? Can't you hear them?"

"The damn you," Tommaso said ferociously, "you could even hear them before!"

In any case they broke through the wall of the holes, and went over there, into the other cell. Here there was, inside a section of another copper hanger, a single hen. They turned the blind back on, and inside a basket they saw an egg. Tommaso dove right in and drank it right away. Zimmio tried to stop him: "Give me some of it," he said angrily, "damn you!" But Tommaso showed him the hen, and said: «Put a finger in it..., and see if there is any in it!»

Then he approached the hen and caught her: she, in the dark, let herself be caught, softly co-co-co, and Tommaso began to pull her neck so hard that she almost remained with her head in her hand: «A tudero, because did you kill her?" said Zimmio, "I took this one myself, I put it in the garden, and so every morning I had the egg!"

Tommaso was so confused that he preferred not to answer: there was complete silence, and you could hear the raindrops outside. In that little cell the gate was open: there was no need to break through the wall to enter the next one. Zimmio noticed it, very happy: «But they have chickens here!» he said, pushing the gate with his shoulder. So they went into the third bedroom, and here there were four chickens. They took them and killed them. «Let's break through this wall too», said Zimmio, disappointed at having only found four, «but come on... so it's over!»

«Let's go, let's go», Tommaso said darkly, «the priests will soon start mass, they'll get up early!»

They got back to the gallinero, and Zucabbo was no longer there.

«Let's go, let's go, let's go!» said Zimmio, "but this guy... de Zucabbo, where has he gone?" They began to put everything inside the lining, the irons and the chickens, and here the Zucabbo emerged. "Nothing!" He said this as he approached, "I had seen someone, and I went after him to see where he was going!" "But what about the chickens?" he then turned white with disappointment, as was over the lining.

"But are the Hindu chickens okay?" she repeated, desperation in her eyes.

Tommaso replied to him with an attack of nerves that made his whole voice tremble: "What chickens, there aren't even butterflies there!"

Zucabbo still didn't take his eyes off Zimmio, who was crouched over the irons, putting them in place. "But how?" he said, turning to him, unable to resign himself, and indeed, becoming more and more upset with displeasure, «you said that there were two three hundred chickens, but where are the chickens? You're taking away the years in prison, not the chickens!"

"This asshole!" Tommaso added, annoyed, with his voice shaking.

"You'll be the asshole!" Zimmio snapped, dropping the irons. "Why? The other time I took you to that gold lace, and if you note that I went straight, then I wasn't an asshole! There were no prison years!"

He knelt down on the lining, with his knees on the mud, keeping quiet for a while, then shrugging his shoulders he muttered to himself: "He said it wrong, aòh!"

Tommaso looked at him, fixed, with eyes full of resentment, which became smaller and smaller and bruised. Finally he blurted out: «No more times than these chest attacks bother you, go and find the subject! Look at the Madonna! Tomorrow is Easter, the day after tomorrow is Easter Monday, I have to go out with my girlfriend and she has to be in white too! »

He had said these last words almost with tears in his eyes, like a little boy. They all huffed and puffed a little: it had stopped raining, the clouds above had broken away, leaving a bit of clear sky here and there with a bit of moonlight, and a breeze was blowing that stuck the frozen clothes to your skin.

«Aòh», said Zimmio hoarsely, «you don't fit in blank, you're a chicken! Thank God that we are free! »

At those words Zucabbo no longer saw, frazzled with nerves and trembling, he took the chickens and threw them at Zimmio, shouting: «But beat up the chickens, you beggar! I have it in my house!"

The chickens, after having nestled on Zimmio, collapsed into the mud with their wings open, in front of Tommaso's feet. This one, also gripped by anger like Zucabbo, gave him a kick that made them fall down onto the lawn. Then he turned and went down the street, without even looking back to see what the others were doing. He did a good bit like that, green in the face both from anger and from the cold, because the wind was blowing

hard, flowing over the meadows and countryside soaked in freezing water. Then he turned around for a moment, to glare. Zucabbo was still fighting with Zimmio who was holding him by his clothes. "But soak that one!" he shouted. Zucabbo pulled away from Zimmio with a yank and came running, wet as a chicken, towards Tommaso, stalking. This man walked with his hands inside his pockets full of water, and his soaked hair on his forehead, slumped over. «And what will I do tomorrow with Irene», he would say loudly, speaking to himself. «Let's hope that Christ helps me, that this life won't last much longer!»

At these thoughts he felt an attack in his chest, he stopped, and turned to Zimmio and shouted again: «A fijo de 'na bocchinara! You want us to enrich you, damn you!"

The Zimmio over there raised his head from the lining he was rolling up, and shouted too, ready, without taking it so hot, because he already had the word in his mouth: "But he's not going to give a damn... a Spy!"

But the next morning, Tommaso and Zucabbo, all fat and fat, thought better of it. Tommaso was very cheerful since, as long as he stays on his feet, he always lives straight: in fact, some saint had made him meet someone with a camera, a scoundrel who was in the military at the Fort, who had said to him: «Are you sorry if take a photo of me?" «Yes, yes», Tommaso had said, and he didn't even turn to go and pose, Tommaso made a show of it.

So he had packed a bag: now he could go to the show with Irene with his soul at peace, lively: a thousand lire, you'll understand, that one had put the fortune in his hands.

Zucabbo said: «Why do we have to give all the chickens to Zimmio? Let's eat one each! With a chicken in the belly who spends Easter better than us! »

It was a fairly beautiful morning, with the sun shining a little through the clouds. Zimmio lived a little outside Pietralata, in some small houses on the Tiburtina, behind the lawn, right in the direction of the new INA Case village, which they had been building for a hundred years, and, for the moment, only small windows, roofs pointed and dormer windows.

Tommaso and Zucabbo arrived at Zimmio's house and called him. Zimmio was asleep. Since he had the girl in Ponte Mammolo, and she and her mother-in-law were Catholic, he had to get up early and go to mass, dead of sleep, with them, up in Ponte Mammolo.

Then he returned, half an hour later, and got back under the rags, immediately calming down again. Tommaso and Zucabbo woke him up. "But what about the chickens?" they told him. "Aren't you going to give us ours?"

«I gave two to my mother», said Zimmìo, swollen from the cecagna, and grey, but with a strange face, which was not very obvious, «and I left the other two there in Via Casal dei Pazzi !»

He looked at them for a moment with the balls of his eyes starting to laugh, to laugh. "By the way..." she said and burst out laughing out loud like an unfortunate man, "by the way, do you know what the priest said at mass?"

And he was so gutted that he couldn't say a word anymore: the others knew that he had been at mass right there where they had done the work three hours earlier, and they were already all looking at him cheerfully too, red-faced.

«He said», he began to tell as Zimmìo calmed down a little, «that thirty chickens were stolen last night! That some sacrilegious thieves were introduced into the chicken tonight, and that these lost souls have robbed thirty hens, taking advantage of him, who lives on charity! Thirty chickens, he said, 'this son of a slut!'

Tommaso and Zucabbo's eyes shone with joy that they had talked about them at mass, in front of all those people.

«Aòh, Tomà», said Zucabbo, «can you hear it? We are worse than Tinea, we are!»

«Aòh», said Tommaso, «do we want to hear mass?»

«Let's go!» Zucabbo said enthusiastically.

"Come on," said Tommaso to Zimmio, "come on, you too!"

So they went on foot to Ponte Mammolo, and were not content with listening to the sermon of the second mass, but also of the last one, the midday one. The priest always talked about them, about these thieves, about these lost souls, about these sacrilegious people and about here and there... There really was a spate of masses, which after all had not been in church for at least ten years. , since they had made their first communion, and they no longer remembered who had created the world.

Then, all satisfied, they shopped under the beautiful sunshine that had defeated the clouds and shone cheerfully on the little white houses of the village scattered over the washed countryside.

And Zimmio offered the cappuccino with a husband, to a little bar in Via Selmi, full of young men with good clothes, all in the grace of God. But Tommasino was impatient, he was in a hurry: he had things to do, not like those two hopeless ne'er-do-wells like Zucabbo and Zimmio, good only for going to the bottom, and if they didn't steal or get into some sort of trouble, they wouldn't get a chance. He felt a calm inside, a contentment that made his stomach tingle at the thought of what he had to do. So quickly, quickly, he said goodbye, said good Easter, good Easter, and took the car from the village, to go to Garbante, to the episode with Irene, all love and a pinch of salt.

4. THE BATTLE OF PIETRALATA

It was a holiday, but all of Tommaso's cronies, Shitter, Zellerone, Jackal, Buddha, Gricio, Cazzitini, Zimmìo, Zucabbo, were being slaughtered, and hadn't moved from Pietralata. Almost all of them had new blouses, perhaps, but what were they doing in Rome without a breccola? In the morning they sat down at the bar in front of the bus stop, which had tables outside, and they sat down to talk about the matches and have a bit of a showdown. Around eleven Zellerone and Gricio got tired of staying there and ventured out. The others had no idea, and they sat in the coffin with their bellies in the air and their hands on the populace.

Then in place of Zellerone and Gricio, there were others, Minchia, Freghino, Cianetto, Capinera, Gnaccia, and others.

Even though it was April, the weather wasn't so good: it was colder than at Christmas. It was one of those days with the sky completely full of clouds, with every now and then some orange streaks here and there: and the whole city seems lit up with candlelight. Pietralata found herself in a lake of mud. But with the excuse that it was spring, everyone put on new, light, poplin clothes, with yellow or cowboy blouses. There were all the queues of people coming and going, from Tiburtino, from Ponte Mammolo, or waiting in a pile for the car to go into Rome; and those, who, like Shitter and the others, were broke, without a penny, as white as turnips, and were hanging around the village, playing the hat, in their new blouses.

Shitter and his friends, therefore, were standing at the coffin when they saw three people in civilian clothes coming forward along Via di Pietralata; but their companions recognized them immediately. Two were policemen, and one was a carabinieri from the village, also in plain clothes. They stopped to buy a bag of peruno broad beans at a stall at the beginning of the village, and, step by step, eating the beans, they went down towards the coffin.

All the hopeless people sitting at the tables beckoned to each other, with melancholy eyes, lazily running their tongues over their teeth or half yawning. They chattered: «What is it? What's up? The charge?" There wasn't a single one who wasn't streaked, and the guards could have come for any one of the gang: so no one moved, looking around with sharp eyes, and kicking around a bit.

The carubbas entered among the chairs and tables, calmly. The Shitter, biting them, continued to sit as he was, and asked himself, a little with uncertainty and a little with fear, while his eyes shone, blissfully: «But who are they pissing off? Me, him or him? Someone come and take care of us!»

In fact, the guards were approaching the tables of the clique, and the word was already spreading around: those who were stationed at the car stop, the women who passed by there to do their shopping, the gangs of kids, the other customers of the coffin, everyone had already enjoyed the nose movement.

As if nothing had happened, in the meantime, the guards went next to Shitter's table, and again as if nothing had happened, they placed themselves one on this side, one on that side and one behind his chair. They were all joking, and the first word they said was, "Well! It's been a long time since we've seen it, eh?"

Shitter was curled up in his place: with his gray jaws, the four consumptive curls on his neck and his sleeping eye. You could already see that his hands, clasped together, were trembling.

The guard, however, had turned to Cazzitini, who was next to him, not to him, and in fact had affectionately given him a slap on the jaw. Then they turned to Shitter all at once, and calmly said to him: "Come on, come with us!"

Shitter was worried, because in that period he had always walked, and in those days he even had the dead man at home. So not even the guards opened their mouths, who snapped: «No! I'm not coming with you! Why do I have to come with you?"

Meanwhile he was half up, ready, with the hope that his friends would send him away. Already all the people were starting to come around and watch. We could hear all the voices around: «Aòh, what's happening aòh?» «They're fighting Shitter!» "This asshole, did he drink like that?" One was saying one thing, another another, there was now a lot of fury: «What did he do? But what's the matter with him?" One turned to Shitter, who had sat down again, white as a candle: "Go away!" he advised him, and another: «Don't stop, you asshole! Otherwise they won't let you go any more!"

People gathered more and more around, especially women: those who were already walking around, and those who lived in the houses nearby, who had come out to watch. All poor women from the suburbs, disheveled,

wearing the black clothes of the house, greasy and dirty, with slippers on their feet.

The policemen began to shout: «Get away! Street! Get away!" But the women who had crowded around did not move, and in fact, began to shout, still a little in a low voice, a few words against the flat feet. «To you wretches! To infamous! Shame on you!" There were faces that were almost crying, red and all lined, with hair on their foreheads and their nocks half loose.

Then, without wasting much time, two of the guards grabbed Shitter under the arms and lifted him bodily, trying to pull him away, to tear him away from the little chair where he was stuck like an octopus. The capoccia, a Neapolitan guy of about forty years old, speaking in a cankerous voice that came out of the corner of his nose, shouted: «Move away! Get the fuck out!"

Shitter couldn't stand it, and began to free himself like a damned man: his shirt and t-shirt had already been torn, and he was still writhing in the chair, with his arms gripped by the policemen, jerking his back to slip away, as if his straw had caught fire. His friends stood there still, not moving. In fact, they had crowded around the table: they were the masters of being there, and they were watching attentively, half a meter from the policemen's shoulders. Other people had meanwhile come, attracted by the dog. Between the bus stop and the little bar there were already almost a hundred people, also because it was a holiday, and everyone was out on the streets. The men, and especially the young men, stood back, at a distance. Instead the women came forward, made their way, he decided to make himself heard, to take Shitter's side. In the meantime, the police had managed to get Shitter to get up from the chair: but he had clung to the legs of the table with both hands, and if they wanted to drag him, they would have to drag the table too. The owner of the coffin began to scream, frightened: «You're ruining everything for me! You ruin me! », With so much anger, with so much hatred in her voice, that the others also began to scream louder with her again.

Disturbed by all that noise, the three policemen had decided to end it all. One bent down, grasped Shitter's wrists, and tried to tear his hands off the legs of the table. But the Shitter, with a sudden rush, as soon as he saw his wrist near his mouth, bit it.

But he took it badly, sleeve and all: he pulled away, twisted his mouth as he spat, and bit down again, this time a little higher, towards the hairy hand. He took as much skin as he could, his nose curling over his exposed teeth, biting, drooling saliva: until he mixed blood with the saliva.

Enraged by the pain, the policeman gave Shitter a tug that detached him cleanly from the table, and he rolled to the ground, crumpled and bounced. The others around didn't move, calmly watching the scene.

The Shitter was suspended in the air, held high under his arms by the policemen, but he continued to kick and swing: to make way, one of the policemen who was holding him had to use one hand, because the other young men didn't move an inch, and the women crowded closer and closer. So Shitter half managed to free himself once again and stuck to another table, sanding the ground with his belly on the muddy pavement.

He had attacked himself even more badly than before: if the two policemen tried to take his hands away, he would kick, with such fury that he had already overturned all the chairs, if they held him tightly by the body, they couldn't remove him from the table. Finally the one with the wrist dripping with blood, he gave it another tug, and detached it. Shitter suddenly found himself lying on his back, held tightly by his legs, with his back rubbing on the mud.

Then he began to wallow like a barbel: his eyes rolled back, and his face was so white that he looked as if he were about to lose his feathers and expire. He shouted almost crying: «Mom! Oh mama! Help! Leave me alone!»

The women were now done, they had lost the light in their eyes: "Wretches!" they shouted. "Be quiet!" «To a poor mother's son, shame on you!» "Street! Street! Wide!" the guards shouted. But a woman clung to the arm of a guard, with both her hands, pulling him away from her, and she shouted to him: «Let go of him, let go of him! Murderer!"

A stone passed over the heads, thrown at full thrust, and shattered against the wall of the coffin: and the women screamed even louder: «To renegades! You have disowned your parents! »

Shitter curled up on the ground and clung to the policemen's waists, and if they managed to drag him a few steps, he bit them, biting them like an angry dog. Then the policemen really had to try to put an end to it: one raised a fist and gave Shitter a blow, who was shocked, and when he

reopened his eyes, he was without strength, and was only complaining as if he was about to die: «Mom! Help! Oh mama! Save me!»

But by force of blows and tugs, the policemen were now able to get him away, making their way through the crowd. The women then began to get under him badly, fueling him" screamed those who were furthest away. «Carry it by weight, you unfortunates!» others screamed, more pitifully. «But forget it, he suffers from epileptic attacks!» «He has neither father nor mother!» «And, a lonely boy, he's also sick, it's him!»

«Come on, kill them!» they brought back the most poisoned ones, because all of them had their children in prison, or were wanted, or hadn't found work for years and were starving to death.

One took off her hoof and began crying with it to bludgeon one of the policemen. Behind her, others, all together, made the charge. Seeing the bad news, the policemen had to leave Shitter if they didn't want to get chopped up. Shitter remained still there, where they soaked him. "They killed him!" one shouted at the top of her lungs. «He's losing all the blood from his head!» «Come on down, let's kill them too! Your bastards, I'll tell you about it with my tongue, it's blood!"

They began to give handcuffs with the chains of the handcuffs; they shouted: «Stop, you wretched, unconscious ones! We'll take you all in!» And one, who came out with the accusation, shouted: "Stop or we'll shoot you!"

He had never said it: all the women threw themselves en masse, kicking, biting. They pushed them from behind, from the sides. Two or three times they fell to the ground, on their knees or on their knees, with the women around them stepping on them and spitting on them. Then they started running, freeing themselves, and pedaling faster and faster. From behind the women threw bricks, bricks and pieces of wood at him. There was one on the street, with the baby in her arms, next to a chest where she had lit a fire.

«Come on fire, to Crocefi!» some women shouted at her.

Without being told again, that Crucifix put the creature down and began throwing lit brands at the policemen. Then, not satisfied, she grabbed the entire casket with both hands, full of lit cinice that crackled, and threw it right on the slices of the guards, with all the focaccia on the ground, which exploded making a bang, with a blaze of ash, of smoke and sparks.

Meanwhile Shitter, left as if dead there on the ground, opened one eye, closed it, reopened it and looked around, indifferent. The Jackal stood with his legs apart above him, and, looking towards Montesacro, as if speaking to the air, said: "Run to my house."

Little by little Shitter got up in the crowd and, quick as a fox, proceeded: he went to sneak between the houses, ran through all those streets, hopped over the marshes, until he almost reached the countryside towards the Golden Messis. , he climbed over a fence, entered a vegetable garden, cleared a field of fennel, and came within sight of a farmhouse. It was all old, dilapidated, like an ancient ruin: in the middle it had a small, dirty courtyard scattered with manure, two or three sheds, a fountain: next to the old house, a new one was built on top of it, a sort of ammunition, right in front of the fountain. Shitter dived into a hole under the fountain, in fact, all torn and dirty with sulphate and litter, took out a key, and opened the shattered door of the ammunition.

There the Jackal was temporarily alone, because his father was in the shop. It was a large, all black kitchen, with a cot, a bedside table and a radio, all full of cigarettes: a pack of joints was ready on the bedside table for the father. Instead, a cigarette, a national one, was stuck with a nail to a wall, where one of the Jackal's companions had placed it when he had sworn not to smoke anymore. In the other corner there was a hanger without visàvis for clothes, and a carpenter's bench with clamps attached, and above all a bazaar of stuff. On the wall, near the door, there was also a sink, with clothes soaking in it, because the Jackal did his own laundry.

Shitter, having come in, took a breath, immediately went to see if there was something to eat: instead there wasn't a thing... Then he stretched out on the bed with a cica in his mouth, and waited.

After a while the Jackal arrived, with a packet of cold cuts and two or three loaves of bread: they ate like two fools, chatting about everything that had happened; then, around two o'clock, other friends came, and, since on this earth, what is, is, and whoever thinks about it is a cuckold, they immediately began to play ace at the counter, to those who gave their hand to slip away, with their tartarted papers of the Jackal's father.

It was after lunch, the sun was shining, and here and there you could hear the radios broadcasting the match. The peasants of the farmhouse, all dressed up in black, had stood in the courtyard, under the badly swept and smelly sheds, with the puppets in their arms, and were with some of their

acquaintances, also peasants, who worked the land in the surrounding area. of Ponte Mammolo: there were also some southerners, some starving scoundrels who were in the service of the farmers for a micragna, and who spent the holiday there, chatting on the mud.

Inside the Jackal's kitchen they were playing nice game of zecchinetta, when from outside they heard a call: "To Shit!"

Shitter was in his underwear, because, while the others were playing, he was sewing up his trousers which had fallen apart, and he was there with the needle between his fingers.

«A Cagò, they want you!» the Jackal rambled. Shitter, with his trousers in his hand, went to the door, opening it slowly and thinking: "Now who's coming to break my ass?"

He poked his head out, and saw one who wasn't a familiar face; he quickly started to close the door again, thinking: "Who did it to me, this spy?" but his man put his foot in the middle, and took Shitter by the neck, pulling him half out. As soon as he was outside, he gave him a slap on the back of the scruff, which made him hit his head against the corner of the door. Shitter collapsed, shocked: this time it was done.

Meanwhile the other policemen came, caught him while he was dazed and falling all over the place, and, dragging him through the mud and debris under his armpits, in front of the eyes of the thugs who were silent, as if they couldn't see anything, they loaded him into the van.

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It was two three in the morning. Zimmìo was sleeping in his house. He was sleeping well, when he heard a loud knock on the door. He was so sleepy that he couldn't open his eyes, as if they were sewn shut with an awl, tinned. "Damn them," he thought, almost crying. Since he was a year old, he had to be the one to answer the door himself, by showing up at the door, if it was the police.

He raised himself on one elbow, which almost made him sick to his stomach. White as a dead man, who, you can see, all the blood had gone underneath him, with his hair on the reddish pedicels of his forehead, wrinkled like that of an old man. He got up and ventured across the small room, towards the curtain that divided the dungeon where he lived with his mother and sister in two. They too had woken up, on the cots placed next to Zimmìo's, and were watching with their eyes open. They didn't have any light: some of it came in through the small window in the leafy wall.

Outside, they kept banging on the door like hell, almost knocking it down, as dilapidated as it was. «Pigs, get dressed!» they shouted at him outside. But Zimmio remained there dazed, wearing a pair of loose-fitting briefs.

«Why, what is it? what did I do?" she asked, looking around for the clothes and pedals, between the two urinals scattered on the floor. «This time we don't have time to waste, get dressed and go out!» "I'm getting dressed!" said Zimmio. He had found his trousers, and under the eyes of his frightened mother and sister, he put on his clothes, collapsed again and sat down on the clunky cot. He dressed all in a pile, with behind him, against the little wall, the tapestry he had, with two Arabs and a camel who were stopping in the oasis.

The others, outside, began pounding on the little door again. With his feet on the ground, holding his shoes in his hand, Zimmio went to open the door, and since all over the little kitchen, on the other side of the tent, there was the washing line for washing, blind as he was, he bumped into the tripod with the bowl, full of dirty water, making it fall to the ground. Thus swearing he opened the door, and he almost fell to the floor, shocked.

There were four or five policemen, all armed, equipped, with helmets and chinstraps, and machine guns, some slung over their shoulders, some in their hands. Zimmio took a few steps back, half dead from the spagheggio, in the kitchen, against the large antique stove, with the gas cylinder on top, and remained there breathless. The others entered inside, took a look, machine gun in hand, behind the curtain, at the two women who in the meantime had also half risen. Then they gave Zimmio a tug and said: "Let's go." Without saying anything, Zimmio bent down to tie the laces of his shoes, or rather, of one shoe, because the other was still there on the ground, next to the overturned bowl.

But they didn't wait at all, they grabbed him two from here, two from there, under the arms, and one blocked his mouth. So they dragged him out of the shack, and behind him his mother and sister, still half naked, with the shoe in their hand, who were shouting: «'A shoe, 'a shoe!» almost crying.

They dragged him under the shed that was in front of the house, two palms of mud, four boards nailed to a piece of wall and to a piece of boards, with a roof of bands on top, and all around rags, iron, some old bedside tables, four old car tires, a padded blanket full of boogers, a dozen stacked bricks, a broken tub: all the wealth of the Zimmio family. They dragged him there, and then through the mud of the little road in front.

Around the other barracks there were at least forty carabinieri, also with helmets, cartridge belts and fire-breathers in their arms: some were knocking on the doors of the other houses, on the lawn, some were taking away young men, and even women. Some were poking the dogs on the lawn, if someone had come out of some small window at the back, others were shining light all around with lit lanterns. The dogs barked at breakneck speed, and the women screamed inside the houses, under the sheds.

The Buddha also slept peacefully: he slept fully dressed, because he was tired, and the night before he had had a drink. He was wearing overalls and a beret on his head, styled in the Neapolitan style, pulled down above his eyebrows, and behind his curls that were high. So he slept, in the queen-size bed, foot-first, but stretched out, with his wife and two children. On the other cot, without a mattress, the mother slept.

He lived in a farmhouse next to the lots, at the beginning of the countryside towards the Aniene, the Golden Messi. The floor was completely bare of bricks: he had sold them. In the large room there were only those two beds, one against a wall against the other, and two chairs to put clothes on, nothing else. All the light wires were disconnected and there were two wax plates on the chairs next to the beds, because they went ahead with the candle.

They entered the Buddha's house directly, as the door was open. They put the lights inside, with machine guns leveled, and asked: "Does Postiglione Virginio live here?" The Buddha woke up, rubbed his hands, pulled his beret up and down two or three times, moving it over his head, until he put it back up over his eyelids, which he had to have with the beard raised to look. "No, look," he said, "Postiglione doesn't live here, Di Salvo Giovanni lives here..." "His lady, what's her name?" they said, turning with all their machine guns towards his wife.

«Spizzichini Teresa», said the Buddha, «what you are looking for is not here, it is not here!» "As? What did you say your name was?" said a lieutenant. «By Salvo Giovanni», repeated the Buddha. The lieutenant looked at him: «Come, come too!» he said. "As?" said the Buddha, all amazed and innocent. But two policemen caught him, one from here and one from there, and the Buddha had to stay there. He turned to his wife, who was watching, with the two little boys, who had woken up, and were also looking at their father, and said: "Goodnight, dear!"

Even under the Buddha farmhouse, which was attached to the last lots of the village, there was a whole deployment of police, with dogs and lanterns, and machine guns slung over their shoulders, and vans.

Zucabbo, who once lived in Little Shangai with Tommaso, Lello and the others, now lived right in the center of Pietralata, on lot two, in one of the streets parallel to the main one that reached the end of the village. Zucabbo was also under surveillance. He was asleep. As soon as he heard the knock, he too, falling asleep like a tomb, had to go and open the door himself, half undressed. He opened the door, and the police entered the house. They entered, but could not get further than the kitchen. There was a sandwich shop in front of it, with an old curtain for a door. They piled up there, with machine guns hitting a bin like the one for roasted chestnuts with a stove on top, a tub full of dirty clothes, a table full of bottles of tomatoes, and a cupboard with display cases with red, blue and checkered glass. like a little frame around it: they couldn't go any further, because over there, beyond the sandwich, in four or five square metres, there were three cots placed across, two tops, and a one and a half square bed base, which, say, they all formed a single bed, with a tangle of sheets and blankets piled high.

Almost twenty of them slept there, Zucabbo's father and mother, the grandmother, four or five sisters, and a tribe of younger brothers. A sergeant poked his head into the room and took a look at all those half-naked beggars, who were scattered there like worms watching him.

“You two, one and two!” said the sergeant, teaching two snails of about seventeen and eighteen years of age, all dishevelled. «Get up!»

The two looked at him astonished as he sat on the beds. Zucabbo came forward, saying: «How? But why? What happened? How dare you?”

“Come on, you two,” said the sergeant.

As for Zucabbo, they took him one under the arm, one under the other and dragged him out through the kitchenette, then he too through the closet under the shed full of rags, which was in front of him: and they kept him there, on one of those little streets that crisscrossed each other on both sides of the main road. All the houses around there were ransacked and turned upside down by the police. There were four here, ten there, that many had never been seen at once, walking around and giving orders. The lights of the lanterns splashed in fits and starts on the shattered walls, on the shreds of tarred canvas and bands hanging from the roofs, on the rubble, on the supports, on the wretched pieces of courtyards. The dogs barked like hell,

and shouts, curses and commands could be heard everywhere. After less than two minutes of holding him there, clutching his arms, Zucabbo saw the two sisters come out among the other policemen, half undressed, with their feet stuck in their shoes as if they were slippers, their socks dangling, their hair disheveled. They were crying. «But what did they do? what did they do? But leave them alone!" Zucabbo shouted. With a tug they dragged him away without even answering him. The others dragged the two girls. They walked a hundred metres, through the little streets sometimes made of mud and sometimes paved with tuff, under the ropes of the slopes, between the rotten parades. There was a whole storm around. Until they turned onto the main road, which from the height of the little bar at the bus stop reached right under the church.

There were, on both sides of the road, two rows of jeeps, there must have been a hundred on each side, lined up as if in a parking lot, one behind the other from one end of the road to the other. Patrols of police came and went everywhere, some bringing someone, some going to pick them up, with machine guns slung over their shoulders and dogs. Zucabbo was put on a truck, the two sisters on another. A lieutenant shouted: "Load as much as you can and take them away!"

Zucabbo didn't even have time to shout something to the sisters, to say goodbye, before the truck into which they had been loaded left, with the Alfa behind it with its high beams on.

They loaded everywhere, on trucks, on jeeps, on red carts, on thousand hundred, even, and on thousand nine. They loaded and took away. Each vehicle took a different route, perhaps so as not to let the people of the other surrounding villages see what was happening.

There were four checkpoints, made up of many jeeps lined up at the four entrances of the village, towards Montesacro and towards Tiburtina. And two other rows of jeeps, as long as those on the main street, were on both sides of the village, lined up behind the vegetable gardens.

Zucabbo also saw Zimmìo in his truck, who was still without a shoe; her mother and sister were underneath her, with the shoe in their hands, trying to give it to her, but the policemen pushed them back, in the midst of a whole crowd of women and children, who were screaming and crying.

«The shoe, the shoe!» they said. «Iiih, do without it tonight! Go barefoot!" a Neapolitan policeman answered.

Zimmio was black, he didn't even speak out of anger. Until a sergeant even passed by, he saw the two women with the shoe in their hand trying to approach each other, and, seized by a chest attack, he shouted: "Take those too and take them away immediately!"

They took them and took them to another truck further ahead, half naked as they were, mother and daughter: Zimmio, foaming at the mouth, was about to climb over the side of the truck and throw himself, kicking and biting the policemen, but the others who were inside held him back: «What the fuck, do you want to ruin yourself? But can't you see what's happening here?"

To cheer him up they showed him Cazzitini, sitting in bed on a bench in the truck. He was completely naked, wearing only his underwear, those brown sweatshirts with the stamp of the Papal Assistance on them.

The panther stood behind all the vehicles leaving, with the high beams raised and aimed at the rear to illuminate the interior: in the trucks there were fifteen carubbas for every ten stopped, but they still shone light throughout the entire route of the village out of fear. that someone could get down and give themselves.

It was all an arrival and departure of vehicles, and, between the dazzling headlights of the panther, the lights of the tigers, the blind ones, it was so bright that it seemed like we were at a party, all that was missing were the fireworks.

Cazzitini trembled from the cold and remained silent. «Aòh, your sister-in-law is coming», said the Jackal to him, who instead had been grabbed, dressed and all, as he was returning from inside Rome.

The half-naked sister-in-law also wore a jacket to Cazzitini: «Here, put this jacket on!» she shouted at him, managing to pass it to him in a moment of distraction from the policemen who, poor things too, were half bogged down in the middle of all that forty-eight. But shortly afterwards her wife also arrived. She shrieked and despaired, forcing her way; she held her clothes tight against her tinks, and she ran, ran. "Stop, stop!" Zimmio and the others shouted at her. «Stop, they'll drink to you too!» But she did nothing, she came forward under the truck and handed Cazzitini's clothes, crying and screaming: «Tièh, to Mario, tièh!» «Go away», he shouted at her, «go away, you idiot, there's a little boy at home! Who looks at it! »

The five or six policemen who were around approached and asked her name and surname; with her hands clasped against her thin chest she

shouted: "I came to bring clothes to my husband, who was naked!" «What a naked man, what a naked man!» they said, "you come too!" She began to break free and start convulsing. "Leave me, leave me!" she shouted, "I have the creature at home!" "Leave her alone," they shouted from above the truck, "she's only got a four-month-old boy at home!" "We'll take care of it, we'll take care of the boy", said the policemen, and they also loaded her, who let herself fall to the ground, anxious, into a jeep.

The brigadier in the afternoon, the one who had come with the other two policemen to pick up Shitter, marked the houses of the women who had started the ruckus: he was an old fracico, who had two hulls a day, with a grumpy voice that suggested from the corners of their noses. He marked the houses, the policemen came in and picked up mothers, first-time wenches, old sluts.

These emerged, among the machine guns and dogs, with lanterns in their faces: some were rounded up, some had already been taken away, to Piazza Nicosia, to the Central Station. Still others arrived, from all corners, frightened, like those executed in the middle of a firing squad.

The Jackal's grandmother scampered along after all those armed men, good natured, and she seemed even smaller, a little bug, an ant, with her hands clasped as if she were praying, and she rolled her black eyes around, ashamed, asking for she apologizes to others, like a little girl. She walked rubbing her slippers on the mud, with her green dress, and all that white, rough white hair, laid out for peace, around her black face like a firebrand, almost smiling with her toothless mouth, as if she were going in procession.

In the midst of another patrol, swearing like a judge, came Anna, who was a porter at the Markets, with six or seven children scattered around the world: a true woman of life, who wore lipstick up to her nose, with her make-up falling off in pieces with the sweat, and all her bad teeth in her mouth, always dirty, yellow; but she was a real bastard, and her eyes were always dark, under that hair of all colors, because every now and then it changed, and it was a little black, a little brown, a little blond, a little red, all burnt like those hairs that emerge from the tuffs, or the tow of the tinsmiths.

Whoever was holding that one, from waving everything that was in the womb: "Cuckolds!" she shouted at the guards who took her away, with her hands out, "Cuckolds! Damn you, and all the horns you wear on your head! Magna pane treacherously! Go and hoe the garden, you starving! Go and see what those sluts are doing with your moji, come on, come on!"

Behind this other guards took away the mother of the Nazarene. Even she had hardly been able to dress herself: she walked crying, with her hair disheveled but straight, down on her neck, and her hairpins hanging down, one falling from one side to the other. She had a chubby face, but pale, with dark circles under her eyes. Her dress was torn in the front, a piece was missing, because, from washing and washing, she got wet, and then, wet, she rubbed against herself at the sink, at the fountain and everywhere: so her belly was visible, with a military sweater for a slip. Over her shoulders she had thrown a red wool jacket, all ruined, which reached halfway up her back. She, dressed like this, came forward among the carabinieri crying, out of breath.

Behind her, here and there, among the policemen, there were many others, young and old, gathered in all the houses of the village: one was protesting, one was crying, covered in rags, like animals pulled from their dens.

The night was now coming to an end. A bit of light could already be seen towards San Basilio, on the clouds, which were purple, light blue, with faded edges that made it seem as if the day was dying instead of being born. Then little by little the air was tinged with light, and the light glued itself to everything, but without the sun. It was a dry, feeble whiteness that clung to the mud, to the destroyed faces, to the headlights that were always on.

Little by little the police also began to show off: the alphas, the panthers, drove around less frequently, the large trucks had thinned out, others were still half empty in the village, and the jeeps too, in groups of three or four, first those from the external rows, behind the vegetable gardens, then those from the rows along the main street of the village, left like blasphemies.

The policemen were having their last sleepy make-out sessions: a boy in Via Feronia, who had gotten up, with a bundle of food in his hand, to go to work, they grabbed him and dragged him away: he was crying, shouting: "But I have to from year to year he will work!»

«Now come with us," said the policemen, also half exhausted.

«I have the key to the warehouses in Piazza Vittorio», he recalled, crying, under the already cheerful light of the sun. «Yes, I'm not going, neither are the others working!»

"It's okay!" they told him, and charged him on a tiger.

The sun was now quite high, and was sending its rays, illuminating a Pietralata that looked like that of wartime. The walls of the houses were silent, because the walls are silent. But on the mud there were the marks of the wheels of the cars and the feet of all those unfortunates, who had tramped back and forth all night.

Tommasino, during his time in office, had been Latin. He knew nothing of what had happened. As for two or three Sundays in that part, he had been with Irene, and then he had stayed with him, at Garbante, after leaving Mecca, with that fishmonger friend of his called Settimio. He had slept at his house and then, with him, since they were completely starry, white as turnips, he had gone into Rome all day to make eyes at him.

When he returned up to the village, alone, the sun had now every intention of cutting through, inside a gray camp bed of torn clouds, after having reluctantly shone on the mud all day.

The first lights had not yet come on in the village, but it was almost there. And there was, now, a complete calm, a silence.

Everyone was doing their own business, inside the house, or in those two or three meters of courtyard in front of them. If the women spoke, from the little windows, at the fountain, they spoke softly, as if someone had died. There wasn't a soul in the bar, and the shutters were half down.

Tommasino and those who had gotten off with him from 211 around half past four and didn't know anything about it, were looking around, holding out their spoons, disillusioned, and looking at each other's faces.

Then most of them hurriedly went home, thinking badly: but someone stopped along the way to ask what had happened, what was there. Among these Tommasino. But he immediately understood what it was about. "We're done!" he thought, his legs already shaking. «They were looking for each other, Shit, they were looking for me too!»

A sort of fog fell before his eyes, his head began to spin, he felt like a piece of lead in his body.

He ran towards home and he didn't even know where he was going: he couldn't see what was around him, the gray facades of the lots, the patches of water, the crumbled slabs of the sidewalks, the people talking around them, burned by the cold, with their skin white and tight, and dirty shawls wrapped around her neck.

He kept thinking those same words over and over again, looking around: "We're done!", nothing else, like a madman. Running, with that

fixed thought, he arrived near Little Shanghai. She never went home at that time, who knows how long: he didn't even remember. Maybe since he was a kid, coming home from school.

He usually stopped in the village with friends; Shitter, in fact, Zimmio, Zucabbo, Lello and the others.

If they weren't there he was with others he knew by sight. He would stand at the bar, even if he didn't have a cent, without taking anything, because the owner was so rude. Or, especially if the weather was good, he stayed on the street. He would go home either early, to have a bite to eat, so that he could get up immediately and be in town at that time: or very late, already late at night, when his mother would leave him a bowl of cold soup and a *cirioletta* on the table. table.

It had an effect on him, returning to that hour, that in the air he could still clearly distinguish, in the last glimmer, the almond trees and dried perch of the vegetable gardens, the reeds: and further on the aqueduct bridge, over the Aniene which it flowed away frozen and dark.

With his hands in his pockets, along the shortcuts where the crust of mud crumbled under his step, turning into a slippery slime that was almost impossible to walk on, Tommasino walked all the way, up to Little Shanghai, like a blind man.

Little Shanghai, at the bottom of the muddy slope with some gutted bushes, couldn't even be made out, it was so gray and messy in the swamp.

It flattened itself there, as if hidden, at a bend in the road, which followed a bend in the river: a depression, already all in shadow, while, on the other bank, the expanse of fields, with a few houses here and there, towards Ponte Mammolo was immersed in a strange yellowish light, as if hit by a few rows of distant spotlights.

«I'll get there», thought Tommaso, dejectedly, «yes, I can see it badly, I'll come down the slope, towards the river, I'll throw myself between the reeds that are there, and who can see me! It will be a question of taking a bath! I'm coming to the other side, and who's going to kill me anymore! If they dream of catching me! They catch me more and more...!"

Instead, in the central clearing of Little Shanghai, which was made up of about thirty shacks in total, some wood and some brick, there were only a few kids playing and some old women chatting, with their feet in the mud.

Even at Tommasino's house everything was calm: they were having dinner.

When they saw him enter, even though they couldn't stand it and were surprised, they didn't say a word, continuing to eat, as silent as before.

The father was at the table, with Tito and Toto on either side, also silent, intent on scraping the bowl with their spoon. The older brother ate on a piece of bench that was near the door, a little light, with the bowl between his knees. The mother, however, ate standing next to the coal stove.

As soon as Tommasino entered, he said: "How is it at this time?" Tommasino shrugged his shoulders a little, more frozen inside, in his stomach, than on the outside, and said: "Aòh, aaaa ma'..." His mother didn't say anything else and prepared him his bowl of smelly beans and pork rinds. Tommasino placed himself in a small corner that remained empty at the table and began to eat. But he couldn't swallow it, and, in fact, he felt like vomiting. He ate four mouthfuls of soup, disgusted, then bit into the dry loaf: his mother said to him: "Wait", and put two spoonfuls of cold broccoli on the bread. Tommaso took his bread again and continued to eat it seasoned like this, slowly, trying to overcome his stomachache.

The brother, who had finished, took it and left. The other two little ones, once dinner was over, began to wander around the little room like two one-eyed men. «And put these kids to bed, right?» said the father. «And give me some money», said Sister Maria. The father, still slurring, went and threw himself on the cot.

Tommasino stood leaning against the door jamb, being careful not to lean on it too much, otherwise he would break it: he remained there calmly, with his hands in his head, observing what the neighbors were doing around him. In a shack they shouted cheerfully: who knows? perhaps there had been a baptism or some relative had arrived from the village. Here and there in the clearing someone was moving: they were especially young men, who were going towards Montesacro. Passing in front of the neighbors they greeted them: «Good night to Sister Lina! Good night Tere!» Or they acted like cockerels: «What, do you like the fresh air?» «Oh, lucky you!» the old lady replied: and they cut along the slippery road, with their hands in their pockets, all shriveled up in their work clothes, with certain short, light jackets, perhaps in summer, and their worn-out lovebirds on their feet.

Tommasino tried to show off, there, calm as he was, in front of the house door. He tried to point out that he didn't go around at night, at least for that time, and that he went to sleep without much nonsense: that he was a good boy, in short.

A woman came out from the next shack to get some clothes hung on a string in front of the door. "Good evening, Sister Adele," Tommaso said immediately.

"Good evening, Tomà," she said, condescendingly: they both felt like wise, old-fashioned people who did their own business and weren't looking for anything else.

«Eh, Sor'Adè! You too, always with your hand in the water!» said Thomas.

«Vajelo a little so that my husband understands!» she did that, pressing the barb to her neck.

«But is it true that Sor Armando buys you a television?» Thomas asked.

«If, the invisible one!» she said.

«Eh», sighed Tommaso instead, Philo, «like you and blind in one eye!»

Meanwhile, Sister Adele had collected the two or three hanging clothes, all frozen, and, returning into the house, she said urgently: "Night, night, to Tomà!"

«Good night, Sister Adele», said Tommaso, and slowly, still with that resigned and wise air, he took a cigarette butt out of his pocket and lit it.

Tito and Toto, meanwhile, tired, it seems, of scampering around in the little room, made their heads outside. Toto immediately, with his head down, threw himself under a frayed and broken bench, which was in the shed next to the shack: he settled down there, crouched in the black and frozen mud, and grabbed a piece of the jar, starting to rub it from the sharp part against the bench.

Tito didn't mind at all: he wandered around for a little while on the two square meters of mud in the courtyard, banging his head here and there, completely happy, with his eyes laughing, and every now and then letting out a cry of satisfaction. Then he too crouched down with his bottom exposed and his big belly out, because it was clear that he had recently pooped, and no one had put his clothes back in place. He was looking fixedly at something in the mud: then all of a sudden he stood up straight and with his little foot began to stamp and stamp on the thing he had been looking at: he gave us a volley of kicks, with so much force that he had to stop twice or three times to go down. As soon as he had finished, he let out another cry, which seemed to mean: "Your damn thing" and began to run around the small space in front of the house, saying: "Rrrrrr, grrrr, gniauuu": he still couldn't say mum, but pretend to flee if a Rumi knew it.

Suddenly Sister Maria, from the house, bumping Tommaso a little, went straight to Tito who was rushing around, took him under his arms and, with his panties on his knees and the other rags under his armpits, lifted him and brought in. After two minutes he succeeded, and did the same with Toto, who was still scratching the bench with the piece of jar, but this time it was less easy: as soon as his mother caught him, Toto opened his mouth as wide as it could be, and began to cry your guts out. "And go easy on these kids, right?" Tommaso said sternly. «Do it... yours!» the mother retorted, busy as she was dragging Toto inside the house, his mouth full. Tito was already dozing off, in a bunk prepared under the table. Toto, on the other hand, slept inside a box, half full of household stuff, summer clothes, blankets, and, on top of these, a kind of dirty and tattered pillow. Toto, however, didn't drag it out for long, and after two minutes he was already stuffed up, little pig, too, and her mother put him inside her crate, calm as a puppy.

It was already deep night outside, despite the fact that it couldn't even be seven o'clock. Only the voices of those who were partying two or three huts away could be heard. The rest of the village was lost in silence. Tommaso still couldn't decide to go to sleep, even though he was reduced to a piece of ice: he was quite relieved, however, and it seemed like a miracle that everything had gone so smoothly up until now: he didn't believe it either. "I don't know!" he thought to himself. He looked around, acting like a good boy who smokes his last straw before going to bed: but, there's no smell of the police. The pile of shacks was completely dark, it couldn't be distinguished from the side of the hill at the foot of which it rested: some unevenness glinted, here and there, and the puddles in the black mud. The only light was the electric lamp on the peeling road of Montesacro.

Even the prairies beyond the Aniene, nestled at the bottom of the escarpments, were lost in the darkness: the light that had hit them even after sunset, like a reflection of spotlights, still fried a sort of yellow dust: perhaps because above it was all sky, and the plain stretched as far as the eye could see up to the hills of Tivoli.

Above it was all cloudy, and clear, whitish: only here and there there were some glimpses of clear, much darker. In one of these gaps, right above the roof, of strips and tarred paper, of Sister Adele's hovel, at the selvages of a bit of unraveled cloud, there was a few little stars twinkling alone. And around that miserable pile of shacks, there was a silence, a peace, a solitude that was frightening. After a while, without even realizing it, as he stood

there alone and dejected, Tommaso felt a tear welling up in his eyes. But he immediately pushed it back down his throat.

5. SONGS OF LIFE

In the rose-scented air, Tommasino started running and caught Zimmìo and Carletto, who were going towards the bus stop.

«To Carle!» she said to him, as he took them back, "please, I have to tell you a word!"

Carletto stopped to look at him, waiting, all pasty: and Zimmìo stood aside for a while, muttering, with his eye which had immediately widened, the American gum.

«What, do you have to get the car?» Tommaso inquired.

"None," the other said politely, with a bit of curiosity.

«Listen, to Carletto», Tommaso then began, hastily and confidentially, «I'm trying to catch a woman... up in Garbatella... She's a beautiful cock, really ar kiss...»

«But vaaaffaan...!» Zimmìo sang, stopping chewing for a moment.

«Shut up, Zimmì», said Tommaso, but with a ferocious laugh in his mouth, «he's not going to bother you...!» «There», he continued to say to Carletto, «I was telling you... Listen, I want to conquer this one with a bit of coaxing, and you owe me help! Tomorrow I want to have a serenade: let's show up at the house, and let's have a beautiful serenade, one of those that I know is your forte!»

«Uàh, uàh uàh», Zimmìo sneered, disemboweling himself, with his belly forward and his legs spread wide.

«Unload, to Zimmì!» Tommaso ordered, his mouth puckering to keep from laughing. But there was already some venom in his eyes.

"Well?" he then turned to Carletto.

"I'm okay with it," said Carletto, "but you have to see..."

"What would it be like today, you see?" Thomas asked.

«Aòh, I'm a white man, I'm ugly! 'Monte is in Ghitara, I took her to study, and who's going to get her back!»

«We ask ghitara ar Bambino!» Tommaso exclaimed optimistically.

«Pzt», said Carletto. «And when he gives you! That's three pliers and 'na tenaja, don't you know him?»

«And for your sake, for your ghitara, for a bad word, how much would it take for you?» Tommaso then asked.

«Four pots, at most, at most!»

He says: «Well? What, let's not fix it, four cents?"

«I know ca... yours. I'll come for myself, just for a serenade, at Garbatella, what do I care!

Evening was falling, and Zimmio was in a hurry.

«To Carlè, 'namo!» he said, already walking. Carletto, however, wanted to conclude the deal with Tommaso first.

"So what do we do?" she asked.

«Aòh, tomorrow morning if we see and I'll give you four plecaria, what? there's no remedy?"

«Why, no», said Carletto, «I'll wait for you, come in touch». And he went after Zimmio.

The lights were turned on, and they shone in the mud, with the light of the sunset, which was reflected especially in a large swamp, there near the car stop, where Sister Anita had her stall. After what had happened to Lello, it was no longer her: she stood there, dressed all in black, with her mouth turned down, sulky, full of anger against everything and everyone, in silence.

Tommaso took the change out of his pocket and counted it: "Seventy lire, damn it," he muttered through clenched teeth, "I'm enough for now, and ten lire for the return, and I'll make up for it, for pleasure!"

He took the 211 to Portonaccio, and from there with the 9 he arrived at the station.

The first thing he did was light a cigarette, and, all hurriedly, although he was walking calmly like someone minding his own business, he ventured across Piazza dei Cinquecento.

Life smiled at him, for once. About Lello, at the Polyclinic, no one had so far been pissed off, and Shitter, in the shop, had held his own: he had been forced to admit others, those from Vicolo della Luce, since they had confronted him: but he hadn't mentioned a single name, also because he had a job, gave himself epileptic fits, gave himself a pacifier, and had cut his wrists with razor blades two or three times. And not even Salvatore, the Fool and Ugo had shit when they drank them, and perhaps they had even forgotten about Puzzilli.

They had squeezed them a short time before, one after the other, like cherry trees. Salvatore was standing in the square having prickly pears cut on a cart. They approached him and asked him: «What are you doing? jobs? or are you always walking around?" "Work!" He says: "Could you come with us to the police station for five minutes?" «What five minutes? Five

minutes of yours or five real minutes?" «No, no, no, no, the sergeant must ask you for a small formality. Don't worry, we know you father!» They went. As they entered the door, Salvatore noticed that instead of taking him up the office stairs, they were taking him down the corridor where the security room was located. As soon as he saw it, he immediately understood: "Here they are going to jail me!" He jerked, turned and gave himself. There was someone at the door who got scared and pulled aside. Salvatore ran as long as he made it, with the others screaming after him, and even one who was passing by, a bourgeois, ran after him in his car. But he couldn't stop him, and he ran level with him; when he approached, Salvatore mounted the sidewalk, and he lost ground. At the point of a college of certain nuns, they must have been the Wretched Nuns, may God bless them, Salvatore, exhausted and no longer breathing, was about to climb the wall, but he couldn't do it and the bourgeois told him: «Stay still, stay stop, come on, what have you done?" Finally with a final effort he managed to get over the pass, as the right ones arrived, and he found himself in a vegetable garden; he remained there a little uncertain, he looked this way, he looked that way: there were some bricklayers who were mixing the lime and throwing the gravel with the shovel, they too said to him: "Aòh, what are you doing?" Then Salvatore took a small door, and threw himself inside, and saw a flight of stairs: after that there was nothing left, a door on this side, closed, a door on that side, open, he took this one and entered a long corridor long, where, at the end, you could hear singing. He ran, he got to the bottom, there was a window and some classroom doors: the window had bars, and you couldn't get out, then Salvatore turned and was about to run down the corridor again: but at the bottom of the stairs you hear the guards coming up. Open the first door he saw, and inside there were the little girls singing a church song, Ave, ave, ave, and as Salvatore entered, they all fell silent. Now it was tight, there was nothing left to do.

The Fool, on the other hand, went by car to see a movement, the following night, with some friends of his from the Trullo village. While they were pounding, lurking behind an ancient arch, at Porta Maggiore, was the panther. He saw them pass, and immediately heard the siren's scream: "Goodbye, we've got madam in the back!" they shouted: they sank and took the underpass at full speed, taking the bend at one hundred, to lose the panther, heading towards the alleys of San Lorenzo. But the Red Circular appeared in front of them, and they had to continue along the avenue of the

airport: they took it under steering, they didn't even go two hundred meters, just a moment, and they ended up crashing into a tree. They took them out in pieces. The Fool was dead.

Ugo was shampooing himself at his barber's, and it was all foamy, down on the sink: then the guards entered the barber's there, near the Funtanone, and one asked: "Do you miss this much?" "Sit down," said the barber, "five minutes!" «Make it quick, we need it!» Ugo understood immediately, he looked at them sideways, from inside the mirror, out of the corner of his eye, and said: "Who gave me this heartfelt call?" He finished having his shampoo done, and all beautifully pomaded and smoothed, he followed his flat feet towards the police station, for the report, and even offered him coffee. Then when they were in front of the door of Regina Coeli, and were about to enter it, climbing the step, to show that they had shit on him..., easily enough he started singing at the top of his lungs:

My Scapricciatiello, Scapricciatiello...

and so, singing, he took the road.

All the little trees in Piazza dei Cinquecento were shaken by a light breeze, which raised the cards here and there across all the pavements of the square and all the bus platforms. There was that good smell that you can smell in the first spring evenings, when everyone is walking around without a coat, perhaps only with a shirt, because the air is warm, almost hot, and there is already that sense of celebration that 'It's on summer nights.

Tommaso went straight to the gardens of Piazza Esedra, and, first of all, went down to the toilets. He was very serious, almost grumpy, because there was nothing wrong with going down to change the olive water. The underground toilets were so full you could barely move. We had to queue for a while in front of the urinal sections. There were many soldiers, because the Macao barracks were nearby, the trams left from there towards the other barracks on the outskirts, and it was time to leave.

There were others passing by, thugs, workers or employees with their bags under their arms, going to catch the train at Termini station.

All these people came in and made haste, chatting and calling each other. Some, however, Tommaso quickly discovered, took longer, standing against the marble of the latrine between the two small screens also made of handmade. Among these, one had been there for a while, an old man of

about fifty, tall, with half-white hair, a coat, and a dog's face, with two eyes that seemed to be cooking wherever they looked.

He was congested, with red edges, as if he were a little drunk or had a heartache: and his entire face had a frank smile, which closed his eyes. A place became available quite close to him in the row, and Tommaso took it, opening his trousers with a serious and distracted air. The old man from his seat, there on the starboard side, gave him a look, and Tommaso, as if by chance, returned it, immediately looking up, in front of him, at the Mom's advertisement.

The other one continued to spin it, fixed and insistent, like an old demon scorned: Tommaso gave him another look, then buttoned up and straight away, without looking back, took the steps.

As he was upstairs, even more serious, he went to stand under a plane tree, on the sidewalk, where a mass of people passed, towards the station, or towards the Stefer tram terminus, and there he leaned against the trunk with his hands in pocket, as if he were going to shoot someone.

After a while the old man appeared up the steps and took a few steps along the sidewalk. He winked at Tommaso and passed in front of him: and Tommaso stood still, like a statue. The old man went forward a little further, then turned around. Tommaso didn't look at him: he looked towards that other sidewalk, beyond the road, even more full of people under the glittering shop windows, in front of the fruit stalls. But from the way he stood and the way he looked, you could see that he was completely malleable and that he was only waiting for some slight movement from his friend. At that moment, however, two Bersaglieri passed in front of the old man and in front of him: all well quartered, two rocks, and with a lump in their trousers that seemed to be struggling to walk. As soon as they saw the toilets, they took the ladder and disappeared down. The old man, passing in front of Tommaso again, as if he had never seen him, went after them.

Tommaso remained there like a fake, uncertain, with a face that almost made him cry like a little boy.

After a while the two Bersaglieri rose again, cut across the expanse of tables of a kiosk that was there in front, and went towards the station. The old man also went up the stairs and followed him.

Giving the trunk a tap with his shoulder, Tommaso detached himself from the tree and, grinding his teeth, muttered: "The hell with this fagot!" and starting to whistle again, he went down the gardens. Then, thinking

about Garbante, he consoled himself a little and started singing in front of people, with his hands in his pockets:

and for my part if it gets lost among the branches...

But there was no one in those parts. All people returning from work: it was still early. Yes, he caught sight of two other fagots, who were next to the newsagent, who were having a deep discussion with each other, but then immediately, all eager, they cut it off and move on.

«Let me have it at Ponte Garibbardi, go!» thought Tommaso, «he can't get a damn here...! While I'm taking these two steps, here, some time passes!"

He willingly began to take a stroll: he took Via Nazionale, went all the way down, cut off through Piazza Venezia and Via Botteghe Oscure, and after half an hour, completely exhausted and almost ready to sleep due to weakness, he arrived at Ponte Garibaldi.

«But they're dead!» he said, as soon as he had given a little smack, with disgust dripping from the corner of his nose down his ass, "but what if we've all lost our way this evening?"

In fact, there on the corner of Via Arenula with the Lungotevere, at the Mancinelli bar there wasn't even one of the usual regulars: that is, four-five starving people, aged from fourteen to twenty, who were there every evening, waiting for the fagots: a little redhead with lentils, half annoyed, who clung to the clothes of those who fought in those parts and wouldn't let go until ten lire or a cigarette, at least, he had collected; Fettone, a tall man, with clothes that walked alone, he was so dry, and with hair on his dirty face and a wide, wide mouth without a tooth right in the middle, who was always laughing; and then another two or three, with their clothes smelling because they never took them off, not even when they slept, since they slept on the clearing, under a bridge or inside some cave.

In addition to these there were sometimes the beautiful minis from Trastevere or Campo dei Fiori, who arrived with Rumi, ready to throw themselves into the attack, and whoever came across them was sad.

The whores, on the other hand, usually stayed a little further up, in the shadows, beyond the tram stop, between a florist and a petrol station, on the Tiber at Piazza Giudia.

But you couldn't see those either. "I don't know!" thought Thomas. Inside the Mancinelli bar, half empty, you could see the counters full of pastries, and the cashier, a little redhead who was reading the *Messaggero* in chains.

Tommaso approached and at the end of the counter he saw, blindly, two policemen.

"Taja!" she thought.

He crossed the crossroads, full of traffic of people holed up for dinner time, and swerved down the Tiber, skirting the shoulder, towards Ponte Sisto.

In fact, behind a trunk, which was at the head of the hill, he saw Clementina.

He barely leaned out with his big head with the permanent bulldozer all in one piece, and stared fixedly and pointedly towards the Mancinelli bar.

She was dressed all in black, because someone had recently died, the black blouse, the black pedals, with a pair of shabby overshoes.

She stared intently, observing certain movements that she knew, hidden behind her like a mangy little girl: with one hand, red as fire from the chilblains of winter, she was holding a black bag, holding it tightly, so that you never know that some son of a slut didn't have some foolish intention, and snatched it from him, with that little bit of money he had accumulated.

Staring intently down there, to follow the policemen's movements, she had to move a little, but, raising a foot, which, obviously, hurt, she grimaced with her mouth and almost had to lean against the trunk, biting her lips. All this, you can see, reminded her of her own mourning, and she became so tense that she was almost on the verge of tears.

«Here I can't dare to do this! Damn death», thought Thomas. «How much do I have? Twenty and twenty forty. I have thirty lire left, damn death, damn it! Let me buy two nationals, go!, I'm out of smoke!"

He went into a tobacconist in Ponte Sisto and bought two nationals.

"Quattro piotto pe' 'guitar de quer fiijo de na mignotta de Carletto, that I can untie the bellicoli! Ar Monte, yes, ar Monte, fosse ar Monte him, as is ar Monte 'the guitar, a fasse da in der cu..., li mortacci sua! Four piots for the guitar! Two litres, let's say three, of mixture, so another five pints: and how do I remedy it? Tonight fo' piagne quarceduno, fo',! I don't give a damn...!"

With his slices hurting enough to make him cry, he went to Campo dei Fiori, then to Piazza Navona, from there he arrived at the Corso, and when he reached Piazza di Spagna it was already almost dead of night, and the florists were closing up shop.

He sat down to catch his breath a little, and to see if Madame was there too. Nothing. She got up and started walking up the flights of stairs.

Sitting on the first steps were two or three foreigners. Up above, in that clearing in the middle, under the balustrade, some youngsters were playing with a ball, all spread out, screaming.

Infuriated, Tommaso went up, step by step, and having reached the top, he took a look at the match, with the two goalkeepers under the light of the street lamps looking tense, and the others in a crowd next to the ball, sweaty, laughing or they pulled at the clothes like they were doing a smoothie. The ball reached Tommaso, who, with a classy tap, prevented it from rolling down the staircase: having done this, without haste, he pushed himself red-faced, towards a small group that he had seen sitting on the wall.

In that one, two priests came down from the top of Trinità dei Monti, all fluttering.

«Mmmmh, the priestesses!» she said, blurring her eyes, in a drawling voice, one of those who Tommaso had sneered at while sitting on the wall.

Tommaso approached, and there, a little to one side, was a boy of a slut like him, with a little black coat over his overalls, reading the Typhoon by the light of a street lamp.

Other Fiji de 'na slut, a big man with a palm-long tuft and a dry man, with his hands in his pockets, were standing next to the low wall.

Seated, they were the one who had said: «Mmmmh the priestesses!», and who now had taken on a haughty air, holding his chin over one shoulder, as if they were going to take a photo of him; and two others also all disdainful and haughty, who, sitting on the low wall, dominated the scene, detached; and two others who, instead, were leaning with their backs against the wall, talking to the males.

One of these two, a blond with Lollobrigida-style hair, was perhaps a woman, and Tommaso walked away uncertainly: for this reason the blond also began to walk away, while continuing the conversation with the others, pasting certain direct and casual glances in their faces. , as if he were not looking at Tommaso, but at something behind his back.

However, it wasn't as if this blond man spoke to the others: his colleague, who was a total shish, took care of the talking. He was silent and contented himself with approving, and every time he had to approve, making a yes sign, he not only lowered his head, but lowered his shoulders, and his whole body, as if he were sinking with his heel into a hole, just the same. to bridesmaids in movies when they curtsy before a king.

Then, to resume his normal position, he gave himself a little shake, with a slightly challenging air, all haughty, but with his mouth and eyes bursting into laughter. His glances at Tommaso became more and more frequent, and Tommaso, moving without haste, all puffed up, moved a little closer, lighting a cigarette.

The other looked at him a little longer, and less distracted: he had eyebrows shaved and penciled in, eyelashes a finger long, like those of actresses, and cheeks, smooth, like a peach, all made up, with cream and a little lipstick. He really had the seven beauties. His Lollobrigida-style hair came out beyond the raised collar of his camel coat.

Even the other speaker who looked like a radio with the two males, who were listening to him in silence, very serious, began to stick stamps of glances on Tommaso here and there all over his body.

He was completely indignant about the story he was telling, but as he looked at Tommaso, his indignation suddenly boiled away for a moment: it seemed he had four eyes, two to talk about the problem in which he was right, and two to peek here and there.

Suddenly he stopped and turning to Tommaso he said: «Who is this guy? He's never left these bars! Kill glove it's good!"

Tommaso grinned, bringing the cigarette to his mouth, and then blew the smoke in the face of the little froggy who had spoken. Let's introduce ourselves while we're at it, don't you want to know? Eh, I say: let's go among civilized people, you know!» he said this, pulling his chin down under his shoulder and moving all over: then he stretched out his hand, offering it to Tommaso and saying: «I am the Popolana! Pleasure!" Thus Tommaso entered their circle: the other little froccio who was always silent, was still silent: but he looked at Tommaso with a withering gaze.

"Where do you come from?" he made the Popolana all pasty for him.

«Pietralata», Tommaso said heavily.

«Mmmmmh!» the Popolana exclaimed, looking at him with new interest, and a pleasant shiver of terror down her spine, twisting all over.

"Why? Don't you care?" Thomas asked.

«Me cunt, yes, me cunt, fijo bello!» Popolana said in a shrill voice.

«What», said one of those sitting aside on the wall, «are you worried about this evening?»

They all spoke like sissies, half in Neapolitan, with the voices of soubrettes, who seemed to have a bean pod stuck in their throats.

«I feel like an empress!» Popolana said instead, placing a hand on her hip, addressing her colleagues. Then, returning to Tommaso: «What, you are brutal, are you?» she inquired, caressing and provocative.

«I shame you!» Tommaso sneered.

La Popolana felt like a shock, she said: "Mmmmh" again. Then she, without any more fuss, getting to the point: "Look!" she said. With her hand she continued to hold onto her belly the coat that she kept loose on her shoulders to have cleavage, and with her right hand, as quick as a dagger, she groped Tommaso, without looking at him, shamefully.

Having done this, he resumed his conversation with the other two males, Cecio and Secco, without paying any more attention to Tommaso.

The other little froggy continued to be silent. He was lost in a quiet ecstasy, suspended over the world like a spirit: he too had his hands in his lap, holding the edges of his coat as if it were the cloak of an evening dress, turned back against the wall.

It seemed that he wanted to maintain that state of bliss, which perhaps would be interrupted if he spoke. He participated in the world with his gestures, with his eyes, with his way of being: it was enough; indeed, this way, participation was more complete. It was also a judgment on the world: "Blessed among men!"

Tommaso, while Popolana was speaking, approached him, also leaning against the wall.

«Aòh, little brunette», he said to him, «will you allow me to say a word?»

«Zì», said the other, tapping the air with his head framed by the collar.

«Let's move a little further away!» said Tommaso, unctuous and confident.

"And why? We're so happy here!" she scoffed.

«I want to talk to you alone», said Tommaso offended. "Why?"

The other shrugged. But Tommaso took him by the arm, and dragged him a little further, towards the second flight of the staircase. The little

figure moved and as he moved, we saw that he was crippled, crippled, one leg was half a meter shorter than the other, and as he walked, it seemed that he was making a complete revolution around himself with each step.

When they were a little further away, in a slightly dark place, they stood there chatting for a while, all tense. But in the end, after a while, Tommaso walked back towards the group, smoking grimly: and the lame man followed him. After sailing for five minutes on the pavement, spiraling, he went to take his place among the others.

He ran a hand through his hair, and laughed tenderly, a little dejectedly, but acting bored, at his colleagues. One of these put a hand on his shoulder, pulled him affectionately close, and they stood there, cheek to cheek. "What did he want?" the Popolana made proud.

«Ask him!» she scoffed.

«The argiàn», said Tommaso, «what did I want?»

La Popolana didn't even answer him. He turned his ass around, wrapping himself in his coat, stood up on tiptoe, did two or three pirouettes, turned like a woodpecker with his zagaja around himself, with his leg pulled up like a stork: then he stopped for a whole beat, with a half-split, under Tommaso's nose.

Cecio raised a leg, said: "Be careful", and let out a fart.

Everyone started laughing, saying to him: "What the hell, do they do these things in front of the ladies?", and Tommaso took advantage of all that joy to spend from there too.

He crept down one flight of stairs, then down the other flight, thinking: "Damn you! It would be best to have everyone face the wall! What the f... are you living on this earth?" "Now, how do I fix these eight lumps," she added, "how do I fix them?" He was desperate, he was really starting to feel bad.

Meanwhile, a little coolness had come: and with the coolness a new, strange vein of heat. Down the steps the breeze carried certain scents, who knows what they were, damp grass, burnt wood, alleys with melting mud.

And Tommasino walked. His shoes were like a vice: he had calluses on his toes, and behind him, his left heel, it was all a sore. You can see that the leather, worn and stained by the rain and the sun, had become harder than iron, and behind it rubbed against the skin of the foot, which went up and down inside that tarry, onion-coloured bundle, with the laces that had not

been untied for a long time. months and they had become all one with leather.

Dragging those poor slices, Tommaso crossed Via Due Macelli, took Piazza Barberini, then Via Bissolati, and returned to the station, to the small gardens of Piazza Esedra. He still had ten lire in his pocket, and he went to a bar to get the latest national one: and he almost got upset as he passed by the pastry shop window, because he must have not eaten since the evening before.

It was already almost eleven: but in the gardens, and even down there, around the fountain, with the illuminated jets of water that looked like ice, there were still people. It was the first warm night of the year: and then with the station and the Stefer terminus nearby, there was always movement there. A good number of people continued to go up and down the toilets, although it was no longer necessary to queue.

Tommaso got out, did what he had to do seriously, even though he didn't need to, but he didn't find anyone, and he went back up.

On the nearby bench, next to a flowerbed, a little out of the way, a row of people were sitting, and two or three were standing.

Tommaso, confused, went over to have a look. Those sitting must have all been males: those standing were three queens, ready to cut. In fact, as soon as Tommaso was there, they said: "Bye, bye", and went away, all prescioloso, like three meccas, whose mother is waiting at home, with the turtle dove.

Even one of those sitting was a fagot. But it didn't seem like it, though. He had the face of a slut's boy, with dirty curls on the raised collar of a gray duster, now of an unknown color, due to old age. This one held a rally among the other cronies who listened to him with one eye, respectfully, and with the other they didn't care and sneered around.

In fact, the fagot was making serious speeches: he had put his hand on his heart, while sitting in lace on the bench, with a piece of his ass, to be able to lean forward better with his chest and his whole person.

His eyes burned with pride: but yet he acted modest: "I'm nobody," he said, "because I'm nobody. But it was my duty, I always did it!»

He looked around, clutching his spoon against his neck, already starting to get a little emotional about his sense of duty: "I've been working since I was eight years old, you know," he continued, "since my father gave me he died, and my mother had eight Fijis to raise, not one... I worked as a barber,

a mechanic, a furniture polisher, a carpenter, an elevator operator... a labourer... all the jobs were mine, that when it comes to work, I've never held back!"

He got angry, squinted, and giving himself many pats with his finger curled against his chest, he continued: «But the undersigned has always had one idea, and will never change it! I'm not like those who say bread and work, and only want bread! I feel one hundred percent Italian! But how many Italians are there in Italy nowadays? Italians with good, real principles, the ones that Italy itself taught us?"

No one answered: but then a blond man came from the end of the gardens, who was satisfaction personified: his eyes were laughing, and he was smoking a cigarette as if it were a chimney, it seemed as if he were eating it with the fire and all, it was so blessed.

He heard the fagot's last words and said: "But stop it, go, you don't even have the breath to fart!"

Tommaso, serious and serious, approached with his unlit cigarette and said to him: "What, are you lighting it up for me?"

The blond man handed him his cigarette without looking at him, and instead looking cheerfully at him, who was no longer inside his clothes, on the fagot's side. This one, without speaking at all, straight like the statue of Annita Garibaldi on the Janiculum, continued to say: «Because the communists, to me, ar the undersigned Plebani Luciano, make me 'na p...!»

Tommaso didn't even listen to him: smoking as if he were chewing poison, he looked around. He didn't care anymore. Kill, kill, they're all a race anyway. Who made him do it to be right-handed, left-handed, this and that: he was a free citizen, an anarchist of death, and that's it.

«Aòh», said the blond who came last, as if he couldn't keep the good news to himself, «there's Foca!»

"How much did he soak you?" one of the listeners immediately said, emerging from his indifference, with a yawn.

«He gave me seven pennies!» said the blond, and completely satisfied, with life having told him well for that evening, he went away, smoking like a nabob, and holding the cigarette between his fingers which were shaking a little.

The one who had asked "How much did he soak you" stood up, stretched, finishing yawning, and walked slowly down the gardens, towards Piazza Esedra.

Tommaso sat down in his place, on the edge of the bench.

«Tell me», one of the boys asked, «Sabbrina? Where have you been?»

"As?" said F, straightening up as if a wedge had been placed in his backside, «don't you know? What, don't you read the newspapers?"

«And who reads them!» she had to admit the newbie a little ashamed.

«Damn», the other exclaimed, «it was a scandal!» And saying this he waved his little hands in front of his face, palms forward, looking up at the sky.

«No scandal!» she repeated. «Imagine that they found him with another man, dressed as a woman, with three-quarters and a Scottish bolero, who were hanging out in the garden ar Trionfale! There was even a photograph in the newspaper! You have to see how strong you are!"

At that time the famous Foca arrived. He was a bloated man with a burnt face, and bald: he looked like my son Nero. He wore a shirt over his trousers, and you could see all the hair between his cheeks.

He came in front of the bench, all anxious, with yellowish eyes and mouth: he hastily greeted the two or three he knew, shaking their hands tightly. They looked at him as friends, eager to leave with him. In fact he said: «Do we want anna?», and was already heading towards the place where he had parked the car.

Tommaso did everything he could to make himself noticed, smoking calmly and looking out of the corner of his eye.

But Foca was all in a hurry: he looked like an officer who had come to pick up two or three soldiers for some competition. The three got up and went after him with a chain. At that moment the fourth arrived, having gone around to see if he could find Foca's car in Piazza Esedra, and instead almost got screwed. Foca sneered at him in time: «A Fra'», he said, «come on!» This Franco, very happy, joined the group, and they all trooped, with Foca in the lead towards the fountain.

Even the other faggot, left alone, got up, politely shook hands with Tommaso, introducing himself, and went away singing, pulling up the collar of that duster coat of unknown colour.

Tommaso remained alone on the bench.

It was late now, and the later it came, the sweeter and sweeter the air became, among the little trees and the streetlights in the square, with almost no people left.

Tommaso got up and went up and down the steps to the urinals six or seven times. It was now midnight, and he didn't find anyone, or whoever was there, he didn't see them at all, and he left.

Then he headed towards the station, which was always a good bet at any time. She walked back and forth for more than half an hour, outside, under the shed, and inside.

There was a massacre of people when the trains arrived, and heaps of people asleep on the marble benches: all tarpanos dead of hunger with bundles around them that smelled of sheep, of tarnished caciotta. There were also people walking up and down, like Tommaso, but they were mostly thieves or pimps: in fact at the exit of the corridor, both towards Via Marsala and towards Via Giolitti, it was all full of whores. Tommaso took them off one by one, scrambling: and especially one that was saved by an old man who was barely holding himself upright, there next to the Diurno wall.

She was a little girl, with two tits bigger than her and a butt that hung over the high heels of her shoes, dressed all in red.

She was walking around the wall of the ramp that led down to the basement, and her grandfather, with drips on his nose, who was following her. Until she went towards the arcades at the end, beyond the road, and shot us, into the shadows. The little grandfather looked around in fear, and then he too began to cross the road, so thin that if a gust of wind came it would take him away.

Half past one came, one o'clock came. And a police patrol also came. Tommaso barely had time to cut. And when half an hour later he headed back to the station, everything was over for that night.

There was a great silence, and the whistles of the trains and the piles of travelers entering and exiting seemed to have silencers.

Tommasino saw the infantili for weakness and fasting. And now, now, he had to walk all the way to Pietralata.

He slowly made it out of the station, walking on the rubberized floor, had the last quarter of a cigarette he had lit by a porter half pinned to his cart, and took Via Marsala.

There were still some stragglers there. But in those little streets behind it, towards San Lorenzo, which Tommaso had taken first, there was no one left.

Only his footsteps could be heard, feeble, with his feet all sore.

But all of a sudden, from a street corner, the silhouette of a woman emerged; Tommaso recognized her immediately, because of her red bell-shaped coat. It was that short girl who had picked up the old man, and who now, after having done so, was hurrying away towards home, clutching her black patent leather bag.

Tommaso thought: «See!», and, lengthening his pace, he slowly almost caught her. She turned crookedly and gave him a foolish look, continuing to walk, more quickly. Tommaso was biting it, increasing his pace too.

«'That's a bad ass!'" she thought, «it seems like a mix between jars and roasted callas to me! Well, he also has a short ass, and if he knows that his short ass is a bad deed... But then what?"

He followed her, already a little out of breath, without losing sight of her for a moment: she had distracted herself, and was almost running, turning onto another street, towards San Lorenzo, which was also deserted as there wasn't a single unfortunate person there.

Tommaso was furious: his mouth was twisted into a grimace that bared his teeth. "Spit!" he said, spitting. «But then he goes, he's without religion! She's drowning under a tram, greasing the wheels, it's better for people like her to have no place in this world! Damn you, this Christian mother! She goes with the old ones too, she goes! 'She's shameless! Dirty! It's not a scandal for life, it's just that you'll get sick of looking at it..."

He was at her height, and all he had to do was extend his hand to do his. She looked at him out of the corner of her eye, scared, clutching her bag tightly.

"Oh yes!" thought Tommaso, «you're afraid of me, huh? Have you understood that I make you cry so much... that with me the one who makes mistakes pays! He goes slow, bitch! 'do choirs? 'do choirs? Go slowly, so that I don't escape, you know, you have to be under this chapel!"

His face was haggard: he looked around: there wasn't a soul in the entire street.

«Here, he died!» he screamed as he was on top of her, grabbing her bag and yanking her with all his strength. But the one who was already expecting it didn't give up. She grabbed onto the bag with both hands and started screaming. Tommaso then loosened a punch, and then another, on her mouth. She fell to her knees, but without leaving her bag, which she clutched by the handle. Tommaso, pulling her, kicked her on the stomach, but with this he only made her scream more. "What the hell is yours," she

shouted. "I'll kill you, you know!" But she didn't let go, and she screamed. Then Tommaso leaned down and gave her a bite first on one hand and then on her other, which took away a piece of meat. So hers, crying out in pain, let go. Tommaso rushed at full speed to the end of the street, and then from there to Viale dell'Università, always running up to Verano. He didn't even look back to see if anyone was following him. At Verano, behind a plant, he took off his shoes, and holding those too, he started running along the wall again. In sight of Portonaccio, under another tree, he put his shoes back on and stuffed his bag inside his jacket.

Thus he arrived at the terminus of the trams and buses that went towards the village: half dead he passed beyond about fifty metres, and went down under the Tiburtina overpass, down a landslide of rubbish.

There in the depths of the darkness, sitting on a bit of smelly dirt, he opened his bag and began to understand, and understanding, little by little, a great satisfaction washed over his face, making all his pedicels shine like prosperous ones. , on the swollen jaws: «Damn him how good this one was, oh!» he said to himself. «He had six bags in his bag and he even went on foot! Look at the grain, how much there is! To Tomà, here you found 'a vena der petrojo!» In addition to the dough there was the powder, the lipstick, the lighter, a purse with nickels. There were also some membership cards and an identity card, with her smiling brightly with her white collar and earrings. But Tommaso threw this stuff into the mud, with his bag, and pissed on it.

It was evening in Pietralata: for some it was just after dinner and for some before, but everyone was cheerful and wild, going back and forth through the streets of the village. The air was sweet, sweet, and all it took was for a little wind to move for it to take on a flavor of quinces, of rocket soaked in dew.

Zimmìo stood with his legs spread wide on top of the Vespa, chewing American gum with his mouth open, with the tuft of straight hair on his forehead going up and down, following the movement of his jaws.

He had his hands crossed on his girth and had a patient, calm expression.

Behind him was Tommaso, and third, with his butt half hanging out of the saddle, was Carletto, who had his guitar slung over his shoulder.

Next to these, on another Vespa, there were three others.

«To hell!» one of these three said, with a disgusted face that looked like he was vomiting. «To hell!» he repeated, moving a hand wearily in the air with clasped fingers, at eye level. He had two blue pupils which, to his disgust, seemed to first turn white and then melt. He had a triangular face, nice and smooth, and blond crew cut hair. «What, are you putting it in the mix?» he continued with a burst of nerves, "what, we don't have the money?"

«A Paino, don't worry about it...!» said Thomas.

«Let's go!» Paino blurted out angrily. «'Namo», and he freed himself from the other two between whom he was squeezed, trying to throw himself on the knob to start the engine and set off, the three of them, about their own business.

«And wait! and càrmete!» said one of the two, the Comic, looking at the Paino with a laugh on his face. "And what is it?"

«So», he then turned to the others, «if we come on our own, why? Can't we come on our own?"

Zimmio lost his patience all at once, hit the starter twice with his heel, and set off in a zigzag in front of the bus stop bar, almost leaving the other two he had on the seat on the ground.

The other wasp went after him, although Paino continued to shout: «And let's take care of them..., to Fumetto!»

The Comic, clear as a piece of palmolive, didn't listen to him. He followed Zimmio, biting his lips because of the attention he put into sneaking between people and cars. At Paino's annoyance immediately passed, his eyes became blue again, the little wrinkle on his puppy forehead smoothed out, and, holding on to the Comic's overalls, he began to punch people here and there, laughing.

Behind him, the third, the American, maintained the I-don't-care attitude he had had from the start.

He was a rookie just over fifteen years old, with a nock that throbbed on his forehead as if it were alive. Black, wavy, with a straight crease on one side.

The warm air hit him, and his eyes were laughing.

Zimmio rushed down the street of Pietralata, passed in front of the Lux, and entered the Tiburtina. Here there was a never-ending column of cars, trucks, coaches and rickety buses.

Tommaso kept his back, thinking in parallel about his responsibilities as head of the expedition: "I choose my horses carefully!" he said to himself. «You see what a figure this guy looks like... de Tommaso!»

Behind, the others were being naughty. The American, placidly, began to tear off the leaves of the oleanders that were sticking out in tatters on the road, and he threw them at the girls they met. Paino, with every successful shot, gave a whistle to the sheep, and Fumetto, continuing to drive, shouted at him: "Aridaje!"

They passed Portonaccio, San Lorenzo, San Giovanni, took Porta Metronia, the Archaeological Walk, did a few carousels around the sluts, set off again towards Porta San Paolo, passed in front of the Mercati Generali, entered Garbatella.

Where the Garbatella begins, on a meadow that remained bare and empty in the middle of two or three rows of identical buildings, and four or five construction sites, there was a house like all those in the village, which looked like an old, patched-up kursaal. At the corner of this, with many hoods and peaks and full of dormer windows, there was a pizzeria, and a little bar with a small pergola entrance.

All around there were the other patched up kursaals, all flowers and junk, some as small as a family tomb, all brown in colour, and next to them the boxes of new buildings, white as refrigerators.

In the Gratta's little bar, around the pergola, all the young people who lived in those blocks were gathered.

As Tommaso and his partners turned onto Garbante, the first thing they saw was the neon light of the little bar, alone in the midst of all that black night.

«You could even offer us a coffee!» said Zimmio, spitting out the gum.

«Let's go!» said Thomas. «'Let's go!'

Zimmio braked suddenly, almost crashing into Fumetto.

They left the Vespa in front of the pergola and took Carletto with the guitar on his shoulders.

«To Svejacore, who made you sing Macera?» one of Garbatella said in a low voice, seeing them pass.

«I'm orange! You do what you can!" Carletto replied, also calm, as one does between straight shots.

"As long as you have a nice voice!" the other babbled again. «Sing us a confession piece!»

Meanwhile the other three, Fumetto, Paino and Americano, had also braked, got out and followed their companions.

Having passed the entrance with four dry wisteria trunks around it, Zimmio stopped for a moment, yawned, and, with his mouth wide, put his girth back in place, pulling it as if it were elastic. Then he entered the bar.

It was a small bar, with a circular counter, and behind the counter were two streetwise men, one elderly and one new.

Squeezed between the counter, the wall and the cash register, at a small table, four others were playing cards.

Tommaso, Zimmio and Carletto settled inside, all alive, stretching a little, followed immediately by the other three, who remained on their own, fresh and cheerful.

One of the four who were playing cards raised his eyes for a moment, and, after seeing, lowered them again on the king of money he had in one hand, with that holy air that a priest has when he raises and lowers his eyes from the missal, and in a low voice he said to one of his three companions:

«Aaaaaah, do you know Irene you?»

"No, who is?" he asked, affably intrigued, and immediately setting the tone of social conversation.

«The one who lives near us, up in Via Anna Maria Taigi...»

"Mwell?" he did the other with the interest of a roommate, while he was already starting to laugh.

«On Sunday I saw her with one of the most named bullies. They told me it's a rip-off."

Having said this, he resignedly withdrew his head between his shoulders and slammed the paper down on the table.

Tommaso, who was there pressed against him, couldn't help but listen: he turned as red as a turkey, and turning with a bitter face to the man at the till: "Three sour chicory!" he said boredly.

"Three cognacs," said the cashier, turning to the two scoundrels at the counter: he coldly took the money held out by Tommaso and cashed it in.

The other three, after consulting each other, took two infantrymen with three glasses.

Meanwhile, a couple of those who were outside, under the pergola, also entered the bar to buy cigarettes, and there was no movement inside the bar.

«Here's Roberto Murolo!» said one of the new arrivals, looking away.

Carletto made a bit of an asshole laugh, approaching the counter with the guitar in his hand.

«A barman! Can you give us these cognacs?" Tommaso said, a bit to divert the conversation, to the old man, who was resting from the effort he had made in serving the infantrymen. This one looked at Tommaso for a moment, wet his lips, and, with a glance, began to serve him too.

Meanwhile the new arrivals, having bought cigarettes, brought us back. What he had said «Here's Roberto Murolo!» now he said: «Aòh, what are you doing with a sonata, when I have fifty lire? »

Carletto, who because of the guitar was the one who was hit directly in the chest, said: "I haven't sunk so low that I'm selling myself for fifty lire!"

The other swelled with laughter: «If!» he said, "keep those weirdos hungry!"

And the one sitting playing cards and who had talked about Irene first, couldn't hold back any longer and added, slamming a card on the table: "Stop it, that's the soup of the stars!"

Carletto, in response, took the glass of cognac and began to drink with his eyes laughing bitterly.

Two more entered, from Tormarancio. They immediately saw movement. They went to the counter to buy five nationals and, glancing distractedly, one of them also said to him: "Ah, here are the troublemakers of the night!"

Tommaso looked at the last two who entered, made a clap, clap with his tongue against the roof of his mouth, as if to taste if it was bitter, he nodded his head yes, then softly, he turned towards the counter and took his glass between his fingers. .

The one who had spoken about Irene first was a postal delivery boy: he was dressed in black, with the uniform, and on his three blond curls he was barely holding his cap with the peak. He raised his eye again from the trio he had in his hand, looked at Tommaso who was drinking, and said: «Did you gargle? Because she's a heavy sleeper!"

Tommaso gave him a deep look. He was silent for a while, lightly repeating clap clap on the palate, like someone who has just woken up, and turns to take his nap again: "A moretti", he said in a deep and passionate voice, "and now it seems to me that you are he'll exaggerate..."» The deliveryman looked at him, understood, obviously, according to him, that he wasn't so straight, and let out a syphilitic laugh.

The three members, Paino, Fumetto and the rookie were enjoying the scene, acting like Americans: the other three from Pietralata didn't even look at them, as if they had never seen them in their life.

The delivery boy finished his forced laugh and, with cheerful eyes, went back to his papers. "There's someone here," he said softly, "who stinks of my breath."

Zimmìo, having drunk his cognac, approached the cash register. "Give me ten nationals," he said to the owner, who was a balding young man of about thirty. He threw a packet onto the small piece of marble that remained free from the box and took the grain away. Meanwhile Tommaso and Carletto, with the heartbreaker on their shoulders, were heading towards the exit. This time turning to Zimmìo, the delivery boy, playing, said in rhyme: «Oh but who will give them to you if they are deaf? mother's purse?"

Zimmio went straight towards the door, and instead of going straight towards the door, he went out with the accused, he no longer saw us, and threw himself like a slut's son on the delivery boy, grabbing him tightly with both hands. by the collar, and mouth to mouth, spitting, he said to him: "Aòh, you've bored me, you know that?" The other one grabbed his wrists, he couldn't free himself, so he grabbed his throat with his hands, pushing him back and trying to pull himself up: the others jumped up, making all the chairs fall over, and started pulling Zimmio by his sweater. , loosening four five pinatas on his hips. Tommaso and Carletto began to defend their friend, also criticizing the delivery boy's friends. But the quickest of all were the owner and the counterman, who jumped out of the till and the counter, and one, taking the delivery boy by the shoulders, the other Zimmio, divided them.

As soon as he had divided the Zimmio, freeing himself like a mad horse, he immediately wanted to throw himself back at the delivery boy, and the delivery boy also wanted to throw himself back at him, and tried to loosen a few kicks underneath with all his strength. The counterman, holding him completely absorbed, said to him slowly, breathlessly: «What are you doing? You're waiting for someone weaker than you... that's yours! But it's not just a match in Shanghai... It's not like I'm beating up a man, it's like I'm beating up a little boy..."

And meanwhile the master, also hugging him to hold him back, muttered bitterly to Zimmio: «Moretto, it's not even worth getting your

hands dirty! You don't know that! He stands up for a bet... and even a crime, so don't give that one a slap! »

So at those words, the two arguing calmed down a little. And the others around too. The owner had suddenly become affable and full of conversation: he obviously had very deep convictions on the issue of quarrels. «To Moretti», he said, to begin with, «but why do you want to compromise yourself for such a stupid thing?»

«Who started first?» Zimmio said, interrupting him, still very excited.

“What the fuck, did I put my hand on you?” the delivery man retorted. The master made a vague gesture, as if shoving a fly from under his nose: "Iiiih," he said. Convinced by that «Iiiih», the two calmed down a bit and remained silent, curling up their clothes, grumbling.

“But what,” said the master, “did the dead tell you?”

«Nòu», said Zimmio, still dark as a sky after the storm, shrugging his shoulders.

"And then?" continued the master, "but don't you see that he was joking? You show up here with the guitar, all arzillotti to do the serenade, and who keeps them from doing something about this fact? What, didn't you do the same?"

«Nou!» Zimmio said again in disgust, shrinking his shoulders with a jerk and looking at his master, ready to support his no against everyone. But the master looked at him with the air of an old fox, almost affectionately: he made a face, benevolent and incredulous, as if to say: «Come on, come on, you were doing the same! What the...!» Then Zimmio sketched, angrily dusting off his black and red striped sweater. «These», concluded the master, «are all good boys!» The good guys all made grim-faced faces like convicts, and maybe maybe someone, halfway out of the coffin, made a raspberry.

«We too», said Tommaso, «are good guys!»

"Well then," said the owner, "let's go!" He made a sudden decision, he approached Zimmio, with a face that said: «What, are we really from here? A morè, we come from the apprenticeship! Listen to me, listen to this guy, he's not being stupid!", took him under the arm, with one eye lost in the distance, and made him approach the delivery boy, who, in turn, patted him on the shoulder, more confidence, pushing him towards Zimmio.

«'Namo», he said quickly, «we are all Italians! Give yourselves a hand, and pass by!» He almost got angry now, because if he didn't succeed in

conciliation, he would make small talk of the skinny one.

Tommasino gave Zimmìo a shove: «Come on», he said, «he's not a pain in the ass... give yourself this hand!» The two together stretched it out, agrily, and tightened it, first moving their fingers in the air, as if to loosen them from a bit of glue.

«Seven coffees!» Tommaso ordered the counter, who in the meantime had returned to stand behind the counter. While the clerk was making coffee, the contenders introduced themselves, exchanged a few nice words, told each other where they lived, what they did and all these nice things.

In the end they asked Carletto to sing a few songs, as it was so early. Carletto took the heart wrench off his back, put his foot on the rung of a chair, tuned the guitar a little, made a Giacomo Rondinella face, and started singing «Maruzzella», with all his feelings.

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After half an hour they left, greeting and shaking hands with everyone. They got back on the Vespa and set off towards the center of Garbatella.

Immediately afterwards the other three who had remained inside the coffin for a little longer, still acting like Americans, took them back.

“Aòh,” Paino shouted, with that little tiger face all happy, “do you know what they told you, how did you get out?” «Fuck...!» Tommaso shouted at him.

"They said you're three bastards, and they'll give you a lot of beatings again and again!"

«Fuck...!» Tommaso shouted again.

«And do you know what they said about you?» Paino replied to him. "What's with your face that looks like a plate of lentils!"

«Fuck...!» Tommaso shouted at him for the third time.

It was still early. They drove around those sites for a bit, from Viale Cristoforo Colombo to the Archaeological Walk, taking the paragulas head on.

Then they went back up Colombo, towards Via delle Sette Chiese, passing through that clearing the size of a town, which, now that it was all dark, looked like a deserted sea with rows of lights around it.

In Via Anna Maria Taigi it was all deserted, there wasn't a single unfortunate person. The gate opened onto the two three courtyards that opened one behind the other, all empty and silent, under the yellow walls, as high as caves, full of closed windows.

The companions entered the first courtyard, then the second, and then the third: in the middle there were two or three small dry trees, and instead of a flowerbed some dirt, hard as stone. On the crumbled sidewalks, against the basements, there were small walls. They left the vehicles there, and some sat on the wall, some on the pavement, and some standing.

Irene lived on the second floor, near the row of illuminated windows on the stairs.

Carletto took the guitar, held it against his waist with one knee raised, and tuned it. Dlen dlen dlin, the plucked strings buzzed cheerfully, like a kind of shiver, in all that silence. Then Carletto made two or three chords, which vanished even more cheerfully and emotionally, all around. Tommaso, red-faced, was waiting grumpily, careful that things were going as they were supposed to go, with the hand that was holding the butt trembling. Once the agreements were made, Carletto, bent over at the waist to hold the guitar tightly between his chest and thigh, turned and asked: "What do I owe?"

«'A serenade!' Tommaso said angrily, with his little mouth crooked.

«Cantaje "Carcerato" said Zimmio, "it's a song of life!"

«Zt», Tommaso said in annoyance, splashing saliva. «“ Prisoner ”! Manna 'a serenade, come on!'

Carletto lowered his head a little on the guitar, as if thinking about it for a little while, then with a completely changed face, with drooping eyebrows, looking like the Little Child, he raised his head again and started singing:

*Nice that you are sleeping
Dreaming that I kiss you
I will sweeten your sleep
Singing slowly, slowly,
Perfume of every flower
Which suits you
And for my part if he loses
Among the branches...*

He had a sweet, sweet and strong voice, which rose high up in the courtyard, along the yellow and dirty walls, beyond the rows of illuminated

windows of the stairs, on the roofs, around from courtyard to courtyard, in all that silence.

It seemed as if something had happened, a misfortune or a party, all a bang: it wasn't just a serenade, but something I don't know what, which made you feel a little uneasy, it was so sudden, passionate, lost there, off course, between the courtyards.

Someone immediately began to gather: some young men who were perhaps playing cards in some basement, some kids; and then also some elderly people and girls, who were returning from the cinema, from the pizzeria. Under the windows of the Irene, which remained closed, as if they were all dead in there, there were a trio of people, who, while Carletto sang, remained quite silent, with a certain respect, trying to amuse whoever it was who had armed the serenade and for whom.

Tommaso, due to his pounding heart, had such a mean face that it was immediately clear that he was the boss. Of girls, in that lot, there were five or six, and some called Irene, some her friend her with the ponytail, the little black girl, some this one and some that. Then, someone would leave and someone else would come. Only the young men were stationed there, standing, or huddled on the walls, listening to the songs, intending to stay there all the way.

They were quite quiet, except that every now and then someone couldn't resist, and would sing a piece of song too, with drooping eyebrows, raising their eyebrows, and moving their head as if to say no no, while with their hands they passionately smoothed the air: then he gave it up, with a smile, which wrinkled his forehead, patiently, as if he were saying: «But who knows! who knows!"

There were those who were now permanent, and those who were passing through, who stopped for a while, and then spent some money, because they had to go to bed, which was more important. Especially the wives, with the sleepy snails behind them.

After the serenade Carletto began:

Gate among the roses...

making everyone melt with emotion. After «Gate among the roses», he made some chords on the guitar, was silent for a while, and sent:

Sea wave

You are beautiful and enchanting more than a mermaid,

Ma chi ti fece fu 'na face strange

He gave you everything and didn't give you his heart...

And then:

Nightingale,

But how your voice sounds like tears...

There was a whole assembly around, like in the films when thieves gather at night. The serenades weren't that frequent, but everyone followed along, good, good, just the same, as if they were done every evening: except that it felt like a tingling in the stomach, and all the happiness, like at Christmas or Easter.

They stood around annoyed, with an ironic face, and their eyebrows pulled up, right up to their black knuckles, and their hands on their grin, with a bored look. But in the meantime they felt like they were crawling, they all melted when they heard those songs. In the most beautiful part of the Nightingale, we saw the gaps in Irene's window lighting up.

After a moment the light dimmed again, but the shutters moved aside a little. Mecca was there, listening. Carletto then put in all the coratella, which almost ended up falling apart.

«Listen to this song», rattled a blond, slutty linnet nearby, «I'm getting sick!»

They all agreed on this. And Carletto sang, all in ecstasy, that a little longer you could see him take off from the ground, like a helicopter, and start flying.

«Angel of paradise, my pupil, scarlet flower!» said another linnet, putting himself in Thomas' shoes, facing Mecca. «I would pray for you from morning to night, I would go and ask for alms, to make you queen!»

Nightingale,

But how your voice sounds like tears...

Carletto brought us back, transported by the holy beauty of the song: and everyone around there flew with him, like helicopters, in the sky, above the lots.

Once that song was finished, Carletto immediately had to start another one, because that was the moment, and if he missed that one, goodbye. He started the first one that came to mind, and since everything was fine. and he was happy, like everyone else around there, companions, strangers and everyone, he sent:

*He graduated from Alabama
uith e bengio on from cnii,
going bech tu Alabama, mai tru lov for sii...*

Having finished this one too, which spread an air of satisfaction and well-being around, he immediately started a third, but in the meantime he had had time to think to himself, and had understood it well:

*Madonna Love,
The moon reflects the glass of your balcony
And you are hidden behind your curtains,
Singing I'm here to tell you: I love you!
Come out to hear my song...
Madonna Love,
It's not time to sleep,
If your heart allows it
I came here to sing
The song of the night...
But why don't you come out yet
If this heart sighs for you,
Madonna Love...*

But halfway up, the shutters, up there, slowly closed, and never opened again: the lights were all dimmed.

«Look who's here! An see!» she heard herself scream suddenly, deep down. In fact, from the street, from Via Anna Maria Taigi, a barricade of young men was entering the door. The moon was so strong that you could read the newspaper in it: and Tommaso and the others, who already, with warm feet, were preparing to act beautiful by taking the means of transport, immediately saw that it was the delivery boy and the cronies from the Gratta bar, up at the beginning of Garbante.

They must have had a lot to drink, as they came forward chattering with the cankerous voices that drunks have. One who remained a little further back, perhaps to take a piss before going up to the house, was also singing at the top of his lungs, shouting. Others were laughing, holding their stomachs with their hands in their pockets. As soon as they were next to Tommaso's company, the delivery boy looked up and said, red in the face under the blond curls that escaped from his visor: «Listen... send us to sleep happily...» «We are kids who really have a passion for music. passion", he added, smiling greedily, with a round mouth, happy eyes, "we have it right in our veins. Let us hear a beautiful song, eh?"

«I'm sorry», said Carletto, «but we're all tired, not just me. And then we have to leave!"

"As? Don't sing", Shangaino then said with a pained, sadly surprised expression. "Can't you do this courtesy?"

«A moreè», Zimmio intervened, «look, we don't live behind the bad girl! We had a motorcycle time, do you understand that?"

"Eeeeh", sang Shanghai, "the sun hasn't come out yet, and you're going away!" And don't you like being part of this gang? no?" he added.

Right at that moment, after trying for a while, Zimmio managed to get the cart moving.

"Come on, let's spend it," he said, his face full of creases, pale with anger and sleep, under his razor-cut hair.

«What are we spending, what are we spending, come on!» said Shanghai with embittered patience. «Then be a baby! And I think you're not a child!"

«Sing this song, come on», Tommaso said hastily, so as not to be a bastard with those new friends.

Carletto, uncertain, dissatisfied, got up from his seat, with his hands doing one thing and his face saying another; he made two deals.

«Daje, che te pagamo un scarafone!» fece Shangaino.

"If tomorrow!" a friend sneered.

Paino, Fumetto and the American had fun like Fiji de 'na slut, seeing the other subjects, hugging each other on their Vespa.

Carletto made one more chord, then sang the first song that came into his head, gradually warming up:

Strings of my guitar...

As soon as he finished it, Shangaino appeared satisfied, as did the other companions. «But this boy will make his way! It's hope!" said one, about a foot and a half tall, tough and stocky. "He's got a terrible voice, huh?"

Zimmio began to push the engine again, without managing to start the Vespa.

"What are you doing?" Shangaino said resentfully, «what are you doing? What, do you want to leave like this, now? What do you want up there? Hand! But it's still early!»

«Quick this shit...!» said Zimmio.

"What are you saying?" exclaimed the Shanghainese, then pzt with a bittersweet expression, smiling sadly. «But it doesn't fit!»

«A moro», he then said very confidentially to Carletto, «manna 'another song, let's hear what, Olliù!» he pronounced this word even more forcefully, with his round mouth, almost biting his lips for the taste of her.

«If we have to go away, that's it!» said Carletto weakly: he and the others had to stay there, because there were much more of his companions, almost double.

Shangaino continued to make them victims: «And, just midnight,» he exclaimed. "Watch your hair!" He was afflicted, full of commiseration, and thus pushed those of Pietralata to have broader views, to be as great as he was.

«One more, eh», Tommaso then said, «then we'll be beautiful».

"Yes, yes," said Shangaino.

Carletto sang «Only You».

«Eh, but this boy has a future!» said another friend from Shanghai, a certain Tintura, who had green eyes, and when he got horny, one was green, and one was red, like Siberian cats. «Sing us a little "Timber Jack", let's see how you interpret it!»

Zimmio farted, and he laughed a little.

«What, are you talking about love?» a little guy said to him, all eyes and hair, in the shadow of Shangaino.

«'Namo, 'namo, 'namo», Zimmio said angrily, kicking the engine again with his heel, which he took up: and jumped onto the saddle.

"Wait! And they are docile, no!» said the Shanghainese. "Didn't you hear him say 'this friend of mine?' He expressed a desire to hear "Timber Jack"; and now you're leaving like this?"

«In Shanghai», said Zimmìo still calmly, «what's your name, what, did you get us anything for the pilgrims? Lassece loses, lassece annà, and so we'll get to this discussion right away!»

«Eh, how bad you are!» said the blond, widening his mouth, scandalized, like a priest or a respectable person, with his eyes full of amazement. «Look who we've come across... Yet it doesn't seem like it, if you look at them! They look so good!»

«Come on, get on», Tommaso said to Carletto. He, on his behalf, got on the saddle behind Zimmìo, and Carletto was about to get in behind him.

No sooner said than done, Tintura, calmly, almost delicately, took the guitar from Carletto's hands, who, caught off guard, left it to him so as not to bother him. Tintura turned it over in his hands, front and back, looking at it.

«Gajarda, this guitarist», he said, calm and detached, seized by a purely artistic interest, «who did you cry for?»

«The soul of your mortacci!» Tommaso shouted, jumping out of the saddle.

Tintura looked at him, disillusioned: the smile fell and peeled off his face, which remained a piece of white flesh, with his mouth folded down, his nose straight under the oxygenated nock, and his eyes full of deep, amazed Attention.

He shook his head a little as if to chase away a mosquito that was flying around him, annoyed but still calm, then slightly turning up his nose, he asked: "What did you say?"

Tommaso gnawed his teeth, ferociously.

«The soul of your mortacci!» she screamed again, spitting out splashes of saliva.

Tintura sprang up and grabbed him by the tie with both hands, pulling him with his face against his, torn with anger. "Asshole," he shouted, "fuck the cocksucker, don't tell me they're dead, don't tell me they're dead!"

"Gut him!" a blond shouted.

Tommaso tried to free himself, but he couldn't do it like that: he grabbed Tintura by the wrists, and tried to remove the wax from his clothes: but he got more and more furious, and remained clinging to him with all his soul.

Then Tommaso couldn't see anymore, and he kneed him, with all his strength, against the belly. Half distraught with pain, Tintura bent over, twisted, and rolled on the pavement with his hands on his belly.

Everyone around began to feel the blood: Tommaso, as soon as he had given him the knee, jumped with his back against the wall of the house: and he was just in time because Shangaino, in defense of his friend, had fallen on him .

He had lunged, turning his back on the others, and unleashing a full force kick, to catch Tommaso where Tommaso had caught Tintura: but the kick was in vain, because Tommaso dodged it, moving even further against the wall of the staircase.

Shangaino then threw himself on top of him to cook him, and was already starting to fan out certain loads that would split him in four, making him turn into ashes and dirty clothes. Tommaso seemed to disappear behind him, who was twice as tall.

But all of a sudden, when the others had gathered in a circle to beat Tommaso to death in case he managed to get the better of the blonde, he stopped suddenly, clutching his hands on his ribs. "Oh my God, Mom!" he shouted at the bottom of his breath, and remained still, as if he had developed paralysis.

Tommaso was there, against the wall, with the knife in his hand. Paino and the other two partners, seeing the situation, immediately cut away and disappeared down Via Taigi, at the end of the courtyard.

Tommaso started to escape to the other side of the courtyard, but there were no outlets there.

"Catch him!" Tintura shouted to the others, who didn't know what to do: Shangaino just stood there still; he had put his hands under his jacket, on his shirt, and had removed them all covered in blood.

Then he began to shout for help, and leaned against the wall to hold himself with his back: so he slowly slipped against the worn bricks, and remained there sitting, with the others who looked at him for a while, trying to help him. , they were trying to catch Tommaso a little.

Meanwhile, Zimmio and Carletto had also escaped, leaving in full force and disappearing at the end of the courtyard.

Tommaso, alone, chased at a distance by two or three of the gang, turned away, stood a bit lost to see what was happening: then, seeing that he was having trouble running away, he ran away, desperately, out of breath, towards Via Taigi, all dark.

SECOND PART

1. IT SMELLS OF FREEDOM

Tommasino's father, Torquato Puzzilli, was a municipal employee, and as always when you say municipal employee, you mean he was a toilet brush. Of course, he used to fare better, when he was in his own village: he came from a family of workers, yes, but they could go with their heads held high, and when it was midday the table was always set, two bowls were always placed on it .

Torquato was the owner of a small house, perhaps built with tuff, in the middle of the countryside, a kilometer from Isola Liri, which was left to him by his mother: around there were a few meters of land, which he worked on, and he had put in stables for pigs, sheep and chickens. And with this Torquato had also been appointed janitor of the schools of Isola Liri: so he had been able to marry Sister Maria, after quite a few years of teasing each other: in thirty-four their first child was born, and in thirty-six Tommaso ; then they had a girl who was stillborn. When the war came, Torquato was called into the army, and on September 8th he returned home, a disbanded man like everyone else. But he had to move out again immediately, and this time with everything he had, together with the caravan of refugees fleeing towards Rome.

When they arrived in Rome, all exhausted, hungry, with their feet on the ground, worse than the gypsies, they threw them together with other displaced people into a school in Maranella, the Michelazzi school, which then, after fascism, was called Pisacane.

Up in the village, Mr. Torquato had lost everything: the airplanes had razed his house, the cannonades had destroyed the stables, and the tanks had made sure not to leave even a stink behind.

When the Americans arrived in Rome, he with his family, together with all the other caciottari who were there, were taken and thrown back out of the school, because it was needed by the troops: to convince them to leave they gave him a few parcels with two unfortunate pennies. But they didn't hook it, because they really didn't know what they had to do to save themselves: then, on one of those summer days when the air boils and every stone is a fire, the guards came and charged them badly, and they threw them in the middle of the street with the four rags they had left.

Everyone had made do as best they could. Every man for himself and God for all. Some had settled in some basement worth two thousand lire a

month, some in some garage, some had a hovel under the arches or inside some ruined building, with the rubble itself.

So the Puzzillis went to stay in that shack between Pietralata and Montesacro, on the Aniene escarpment: a villager had left it to them, who had made money with the black market, and then they had drunk it. From that time they always remained there: at first Torquato made do as he could, then they put him inside the municipality, and he became a toilet brush.

So he began to ask a lot of questions, to the municipality, to the registry office, to the priests, to all the saints, to have a house, as soon as the war was over: instead months, years had passed, but his house was always the one, in that little village, which in the summer was always on the verge of catching fire, and in the winter of being flattened by the mud, on the river: and by now he had resigned himself to putting down his roots in that place, with his wife and children, all their lives.

But then one day they began to plaster buildings all around there, on the Tiburtina, just above the Forte: it was an INA Case undertaking, and the houses began to appear, on the meadows, on the mounds. They had strange shapes, with pointed roofs, terraces, dormer windows, small round and oval windows: people began to call those blocks Alice in Wonderland, Fairy Village, or Jerusalem: and everyone laughed at them, but everyone who lived in the villages in those nearby, they began to think: «Aaaah, finally they're giving me a harem too!» And there was none of the slum dwellers, the evicted, the displaced who hadn't tried to present the application, to get them out of those miserable slums where they lived.

Indeed, none the less, as soon as the neighborhood was almost finished and it appeared empty and all neat and dirty among the rubbish and the rubbish, one night, all the inhabitants of the surrounding area, in agreement, convulsed and planned the movement: they took it and they went to occupy, as in the Far West, the first to arrive was what they occupied.

Mostly women, they entered the company's houses, since the streets were not yet there, discarded the guards, and starting to bite each other, and, when necessary, even unsheathed their axes, occupied the apartments and positioned themselves .

For five or six days they were locked inside. The police had come and surrounded the buildings: there were all jeeps and vans driving around, blocking the entrances to Jerusalem.

Even Sister Maria, with the other women, had gone to occupy the house: and the eldest son looked after Tito and Toto in the shack, and brought them some bread and rags to eat, when he could, which the police now he let people go and now he doesn't, asking everyone for documents.

One fine day, however, or rather, one evening when it was raining like crazy, the order came to uproot them: the police commissioner showed up in person, and in a few hours everything went back to normal: about fifty women took them away on carts, and the village returned empty and deserted, with the last few moving aside, carrying the rolled up snotty mattresses on their heads.

A few more months passed, and the first authorized families began to come to stay: all municipal employees, more or less, people who needed it less. Some apartments were still vacant, but there were thousands of applications. And now some of the many saints that Sister Mary had always prayed to for ten years or more made themselves known.

Who would have ever believed it? One of the small apartments at INA Case was assigned to Torquato Puzzilli. Darnit! The misfortune of running after him with the stick was tired! Happy that he was singing, Mr. Torquato offered a drink to all those in the shacks, smashed some of the old shards for good luck, distributed others to the neighbors, and in the end he even negotiated with someone to sell him the shack: fifty brandons, damn, and when had he ever seen them! He took out all the stuff, and loaded it onto a hand cart: having done this, he stood at the door of the little house, with an aluminum pile leveled with water, and threw it on the ground, to make it flood, because he didn't want to go back there again, not even with his feet in front.

So Tommaso's family had settled in at INA Case: in an apartment with two bedrooms and a kitchen, and they were quite spacious, too, because, in the meantime, while Tommaso was still in the shop, Tito and Toto had ironed their legs, and they no longer walked around the house.

First, Tito had felt bad: when his mother, in the morning, had come to take him out of the box where he slept, she had seen him crying, all dirty with snot and vomited stuff. She immediately took him into her arms, trying to console him, but her baby continued to cry, with his little head lost on his mother's shoulder, because he couldn't hold it.

Then Sister Maria put him back in the box and gave him boiling wine to drink, to warm his blood.

The boy, half drunk, felt a little dazed, but when he woke up he was worse than before, and even vomited up his glass of wine.

He felt sicker and sicker throughout the day, and into the following night. In the morning his mother took him, who was already no longer able to see, and was a pile of rags, to the Pietralata clinic.

It was winter, and it took him a long time to get there, in the mud, in the rain. He waited in line at the clinic, which was in one of the lots next to the car stop, and when it was her turn, the doctor told her that the boy was very sick, and that it would be better to take him to the hospital. At the hospital, two days later, Tito died, after having writhed all night, screaming and writhing in pain.

Toto, without his brother, was left as if astonished: he found himself all alone, in the little courtyard in front of the shack, between the brick walls and the clothes on the hangers, and he couldn't figure out what he was doing.

He had always been with Tito, and continued to believe that he was still there, beside him. From time to time she called him, called him, and then went and grabbed her mother's skirts, as if to ask her to explain to him that she was there. After a while he remembered it, went back to running around in the mud, alone, then looked around again, collapsed, to call Tito.

There was still a completely gutted suitcase lying around the house, found in a drain, where he and Tito used to sit, pretending to be in a van: he sat down even now, alone, in there, doing a little "rrrr », «gneeeeu», then he fell silent, and perhaps dozed off, covered in rags like a ball. Or he would wander around like a blind man inside the shack or in the courtyard, calling his mother for hours at a time: "Come on, Ma! Loves! Mothers!»

There was also a pallet of rags left: one day when the sun had come a little, he started playing with that very pallet, because he had found it by chance under a rusty bandage in the shed. He threw it in the air, with both hands, and then ran to catch it where it fell: there he tried to kick it, his face became ferocious and red from the effort, whack, and he didn't catch us, whack, and he didn't catch us. he caught it again, risking scapicollar: finally he caught it full on the tip, and the ball shot far away.

So he went out of the little courtyard, among the other shacks, crossed the little bridge over the moat that divided the village of shacks from the road, and started playing where he was.

While he was running after the pallet, at a trot, the car came from around the curve towards Montesacro: he didn't have time to brake, and hit it with the bumper, throwing it long into the ditch.

Toto went to bang his head against a stone placed in the mud, and remained there still, all padded in his t-shirts placed one on top of the other, the tough zella shorts, short shorts, and the socks rolled up on his worn-out boots: he didn't move, it was as if he were asleep, only a drop of blood came out from behind his ears, and stained the little bit of crumpled grass under the stone.

During all this time Tommasino wasn't there: he was on holiday, in fact, by now he was almost moldy, given that he had only been there for a little while, and dawn was only a few months away.

Well, Sister Maria was right when she always told him: whoever turns the night turns death. He didn't feel it at all, but Garbante's punch cost him a lot, and he had a lot of time to cry over it.

From Via Anna Maria Taigi, in short, he had slipped away towards Cristoforo Colombo, also amazed at being still in the world; and, thinking that the police would come to attack those gangs, he went to duck into the small sewer that passes under the avenue, between one marana and another: against the wall of the little tunnel, on the black and stinking water, there was some earth, even blacker and smellier. Tommaso hid there, stretching out between two or three rows of kids, and, numb from the cold, fell asleep.

As it became day, little by little we made a trek all the way to Pietralata, and arrived near the village of the shackled inmates. He walked with his eyes long and cocked to cut to the first one up there: "Let's hope that no one is there, that they haven't recognized me!" it was said. «But first I'll take a good look, yes there's a lot of movement, if not, who's going home, this shit...!»

He got closer and saw everything calm, with only the kids making a bit of noise, playing among the stalls in the courtyards.

Reassured, he was about to enter the house, opened the door, and instead immediately saw Madame.

Without thinking twice, he headed for the river bank, towards the reeds: but the police had caught sight of him, had thrown themselves after him, and were at his heels. He ran, turned around and saw them from behind, and at the same time the other one who had remained in the tiger, out of sight, started the car and came running forward: he faced him with the witty slant

on his snout. , while the other two were already on top of him, shouting: "Stop, Puzzilli, we won't do anything to you!"

They took him and took him to the police station, and, in short, sent him to the drinking den.

After two months a gunman, one evening, brought the case sheet to his cell, and the most experienced prisoner, one who had the code in his pocket, seeing the sheet said: «Ca... here is a first degree case, go to the third section! Wednesday, odd day, there's Mattacchione... Then go to Mattacchione, he'll murder you, my son... It's better for you to call in sick, have it postponed!»

In fact, this Fool actually murdered him: the public prosecutor threw the code into his chest, and there was little left over for the three Sardinian days, today, tomorrow, and always.

So, limply, Tommaso returned to his cell on the third wing, with two caps on his back. «Aòh, how much did they support you, how much did they support you?» they shouted at him. "Almost two years". «Eh, you do some shit on the bujolo, and luck! You are liberating!»

It was evening, the first of his two turns of the calendar, a beautiful, sweet, sweet summer evening, with a charged, serene light that never died. The usual noise from the prison could be heard all around: those from the arms who were chatting and still calling each other calm, and those from the transit who were crying, because it was dusk, the prisoner's time.

Then the voices from one arm to the other were heard louder and more cheerful. Night was coming. «To spies on the fifth arm!» one shouted, "to cuckolds!" «Look, I'm your brother-in-law!» they answered him. And the first: «But look, today you brought me er tuzzooo!»

Then, little by little, everyone began to cling to the bars, and everyone shouted together, in the air that was a caress: "You slut, I'm in prison because you got me dirty, sister!" «Fifth arm! From today you have been assigned two infamous ones! A lot of our friends have made a fuss about it, let's have fun!" «To Chippeee! Think about it, dear!" «A Weakness, do you have the svampoooo? Did you bring it to you mojeee? Send me some joints!"

From the Janiculum, far away, all full of lights, with the evening breeze, came the voices of those who came to call friends and relatives, and especially sluts, who came to call the pimps.

A son could be heard shouting, leaning over the wall: «A papaneee, on Sunday we'll come and have a talk with you, mum and I! Don't get poisoned!" And a slut, with a voice that surpassed all of them, as sharp as a drill: "In Bengalaa, today I put two bags in your door!"

And then the voices of the Marys from the Mantellate: the men of the seventh wing began, which was the closest. «To mariaaa!» one said, "I want to die!" "Hang you!" they replied.

The night progressed like this, and towards midnight, there was always one, the same one, who from his cell started shouting at the top of his lungs: «Brothers! The voice of the soul speaks to you! » And from all branches the shopkeepers responded in chorus: «De li mortacci tuaaa!»

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When Tommaso returned to freedom it was a beautiful May sunset. It was the first time that Tommaso had seen the finished INA Case: when he went to work it was still a lot of construction sites, which people were now starting to look at with irony, because from then on they understood what had to come out of it. Now it was there, all nice and ready, with a sort of little wall around it over the little lawns which remained what they were, full of filth. The new new streets curved in between the houses, pink, red, yellow, all crooked too, with piles of balconies and dormer windows, and rows of parapets. Arriving by bus, to see it, that neighborhood really looked like Jerusalem, with that mass of sides, one on top of the other, lined up on the lawns, against the old quarries, and fully bathed in sunlight.

Tommaso got off at Fiorentini, went back up a little, and took the first street that entered the neighborhood. He looked at the table: it was called Via Luigi Cesana. «Via Luigi Cesana», said Tommaso, swallowing a little saliva with satisfaction, «and let's take this little Via Luigi Cesana here!» His heart was beating so fast that he almost felt dizzy. He knew that his house was in Via dei Crispolti, n. 19: but where the hell this street was, he really had no idea. He looked around sullenly, pulling his mouth down and widening his eyes. "I don't know..." he would say. He didn't know who to ask: he was a little ashamed of people, because of the prison. It's true that in the end he hadn't even been there for two years, and now he came out still smelling of freedom. But it annoyed him that the people of the new neighborhood where he now lived should find out about it. So he tackled a little boy who was running towards the house with a bottle of milk. «A rega», he said brusquely, «Via dei Crispolti, where can you find it?» The

boy explained it to him: "Up there, on the right!" Tommaso calmly followed the indication, but first a straw was lit: and so, smoking, he arrived at this Via dei Crispolti.

It was one of the last roads of the INA Case: it curved towards the meadows, all wavy and burnt under the sun. There were six or seven buildings, crooked, slanted, with rows of round windows, painted dark pink, with doors that could be reached by taking five or six steps, and many zigzag balustrades that joined them together: then behind these the road ended suddenly, against another road, without houses, cut into the tuff. And all around, the meadows. Further down there was an old farmhouse with some oak trees, and, on the other side towards the village, isolated in a small clearing, there was a small wooden church, with a metal fence around it.

The air was warm, sugary: everywhere there was sun, only sun, yellow and calm.

A few women were singing at the windows, because sunset was now beginning to come; and the kids played in the street: here in Via dei Crispolti the puppets, with balls, down there in the half-asphalted road between the little tuff walls, a gang of the biggest ones were playing a match with a patched-up ball. Under a small fountain, in lace in Via dei Crispolti, someone was singing like a finch, in the sweet sweet air a new song that had come out in those months and that Tommaso didn't know:

Hey Lazzarella...

Tommaso had stopped to look at his house, which was one of two or three buildings painted dark pink: it rose almost like a lace to the street, against the prairies, all beautiful, clean and new.

Then, with a lump in his throat due to emotion, almost crying, Tommaso went inside, frowning a little, so as not to show what he felt. He had always lived, for as long as he could remember, in a shack of rotten wood, covered with bands and tarpaulin, among the rubbish, the mud, the shit: and now instead, finally, he lived in none other than a small building, and luxury, too, with beautiful plastered walls and stairs with kiss-finished railings.

He went up, he knew it was for nothing, just to see, because he didn't have the keys, and there was no one at home, because everyone was busy at that hour. She arrived at inside twenty-nine. Here a new nice surprise

awaited him: on the door there was a business card stuck, with Puzzilli written on it: PUZZILLI, in large and elaborate letters. «Dead them!» Tommaso muttered, laughing red, with his eyes still shining with emotion.

On the landing there was a small round window, which you could barely reach with your nose. Tommaso went to take a look at it. There you could see half of Rome: a mess of houses, in the light, on the already slightly dark grounds, without end, which seemed to float on the clouds, up and down, from Montesacro to Piazza Bologna, to San Lorenzo, to Casal Bertone, to Prenestino, in Centocelle, in Villa Gordiani, in Quadraro... Sirens were sounding, and, down there, a little bell made a shrieking sound.

Very happy, Tommaso took his nose away from the window, and, walking with his hands in his pockets, went down the stairs. He had to wait until at least seven to be able to enter, as no one would certainly come back before then.

He took it and happily pedaled along Via dei Crispolti, after having a drink at the fountain, singing too, in half his breath. He took Via Luigi Cesana again, crossed the Tiburtina in front of the Fort and went down towards Pietralata.

Along the way he thought about his own things: that is, he thought about only one thing, which made his heart beat like a hammer, and filled him with joy that was no longer inside his skin. He sang louder and louder, while in his imagination he imagined Tommaso going in and out of the new building, bored and calm, all dressed up, as if he had always lived in houses like this.

He looked with an indifferent air at those who were still there, in the houses of the evicted, or perhaps in Little Shanghai, slain dead of hunger, who were walking around, slaughtered, looking for money. It was time for the end of work: the buses began to arrive loaded with piles of people on the running boards, and inside the Fort the trumpets of free exit sounded.

The village was beginning to come alive for the evening, although the sun still shone warm and placid; so Tommaso found them all in front of the bar, the good ones, placed there as if ready to receive the liberator's visit.

They stood here and there, some at the tables, some standing against the trunks of the foliage trees.

Zimmìo with his yellow t-shirt untucked, together with two or three others, slaughtered like him, was pulling some tools to make a dog run, which had fallen in with those gangs. This one was already all tied up, with

his fur standing on end, and his tongue hanging out and rubbing on the dust: he didn't understand that they were making him a subject, taking advantage of his naivety, and he took pity running like a scoundrel up and down, to bring back the soldiers. between the teeth.

Zimmìo, the son of a slut, tried to shoot further each time, and he tried his hardest, so that he too was a little hooked. As soon as he managed to throw the gravel around the edge of a crumbling farmhouse and three or four low walls, towards the fields white with dust around the Aniene, he was completely happy and his mouth opened grinning with satisfaction.

Shitter was sitting on a piece of wall, reading a newspaper that he had taken from a boy.

"See who's there," said Zucabbo, who was standing there with his legs apart in the middle of the street, waiting for who knows what.

Five or six faces, that of the Buddha, that of the Jackal, that of Minchia, that of Cazzitini, that of Nazzareno, turned towards Tommaso, all sleepy, pale, with an expression of tiredness and boredom. "Like the cow?" asked Zucabbo, shaking hands with Tommaso, an old prison veteran. «Good», said Tommaso. «Who did you do it to, is he throwing it?» said the Buddha, speaking with his belly. The others had a few laughs. But Tommaso, looking at their faces, laughed more than them. «Laugh, laugh, at the knife faces», he thought, with his eyes narrowed, «in the meantime I'll give you ner cu... to everyone!» He thought about his house, calmly: about the beautiful new house he had there, while all the others were still living in the huts, one dying of hunger worse than the other.

Then the bus arrived, and the gang disappeared running towards the stop, like a flock of crows, Zucabbo included.

Tommaso calmly went to shake hands with Zimmìo and Shitter, who greeted him by yawning. Zimmìo let go of the dog, which immediately sprawled in the dust, half dead, continuing to look at his killer with shining eyes. Just to pass the time, Zimmìo began to make a drop of water against the wall where, a little further away, Shitter was busy reading the newspaper, and every now and then, turning suddenly, still grinning, he made some splashes on the dog.

The sun was now low over the tarnished fields. The noise of voices could be heard throughout the village, and here and there some singing. Tommaso also sat down on the wall, hugged his leg against his chest, with his beard on his knee, and began to hum happily again.

After a while Lello also arrived from those gangs. Since he was unhappy, Tommaso, glaring at him, let go of the leg he was holding tightly in his arms, stood up and went to meet him.

«A Le', a Le'», he said, clapping his hand on the shoulder, «how are you doing, a Le'?»

«Hello, Tomà», Lello said, shaking his hand.

Tommaso had taken on the air of an old friend, who acts cheerful to make the other understand that, after all, his misfortune is stupid, that no one pays attention to it.

«And what do you say to Le' then?» she did.

«What can I tell you! 'This f...!' Lello said, continuing to drag his unhappy leg towards the coffin.

«Damn, how bad he is in the shop!» Tommaso then said, just to continue the conversation.

"I believe you!" said Lello, still dark-faced, greasy and gray like his crotches.

«Eeeeh», sighed Tommaso, «the damn rags!»

They arrived in front of the open door of the coffin, full of crowd.

Tommaso, not knowing what to say, and still with his heart occupied by the thought of the house, and by nothing else, heaved another sigh, then took and lit a cigarette: «How life has come from them!» he said.

Lello stopped and looked at him for a moment, askance.

«To Puzzilli», he said, «I owe myself a place here, I salute you, be well!»

He took it and turned on his heel, going about his business, up a muddy hill, beyond the coffin, between two abandoned buildings there, between the dust and nettles of the first fields.

He went up, pulling his leg, between the folds of dry mud and some dirty paper, and disappeared around the corner.

Tommasino stretched, yawned, leaving the yawn halfway, clicked his tongue against the roof of his mouth, like someone who has just woken up after a good sleep, and wasting time, with his hands stuffed in his pockets as deep as he could, he returned on a flat surface, towards INA Case.

He had a great calm in his heart, and he enjoyed both freedom and the thought of home.

He arrived step by step at Tiburtina, full of Bersaglieri who, at sunset, went on leave, turned into Via Luigi Cesana, and went up, this time looking carefully around the neighborhood where he lived, towards his house in Via dei Crispolti.

He started looking again at the house, all beautifully painted in bright pink, which stood out with its balconies and dormer windows, against the still shiny sky. Around there, beyond the pipes, there were now some older boys who had returned from work. Five or six were playing cards, sitting on the floor under their house. Over there, at the coffin, on the corner of a low building in the center of the INA Case, which was the market, the first cliques of young men from the blocks gathered, squatting on chairs.

Tommaso wanted to take a good look at the surroundings: he went a little further up Via Luigi Cesana, and arrived at the last houses, which now overlooked expanses of meadows and quarries, with the old villa surrounded by oak trees at the end.

Even from there you could go towards Tommaso's house: you had to enter the meadow, all full of mounds, humps, rubbish, then turn down to the right along the slope dug into the tuff meadow to build the houses there. Tommaso's house also had an entrance on that side: through a vertical row of windows you could see the stairs. Tommaso was delighted to see all that luxury. «Kill those windows!» he thought.

From up there, where Tommaso was, however, a sort of black skunk trail began, which, passing through the meadow, led from the end of Via Luigi Cesana to the little wooden church, which was in the middle of the meadow.

Along that black track which was now of no use, because the meadow was dry, Tommaso decided to go towards the church. This was a kind of warehouse, long and narrow, made of light brown wood, with the shelves divided by long grooves. It had a pointed roof, and a cross on top. All around there was a new metal fence, which enclosed the church and a bit of courtyard. Behind the church, at the end, an identical and lower building could be seen attached, which must have been the priest's home. On the lawn, along the copper road, Tommaso approached us, because he heard voices at the end. Behind the little church, in front of his house, the meadow, which was a sort of plateau, had been dug up, and there was a hollow, with foundations, fences and a bucket in the middle. Everything was at a standstill, because by now the workers had stopped. There at the

top, solitary like an observatory, from where you could see half of Rome, there was the construction site's white and dusty benches.

The voices that were heard came from a small courtyard behind the priest's wooden house, against the slope. They were boys playing in a lace shed in the small courtyard of the rectory. The last light of the sun, red and now a little cool, briefly illuminated that site. Four little ones were playing table football, and two others were playing ping pong: others were watching, sitting on some crates.

Tommaso knew that two categories of people lived at INA Case: on the one hand state employees, railway workers, tram drivers, who had had a home through their companies: and among them there were also accountants, surveyors and respectable people that pasta. On the other side there were those who had lived in hovels and houses, to whom the municipality assigned a house from time to time, and who were all people who had died of hunger or evil.

Those there who were playing in the church courtyard must have all been students who were father's sons: and more or less they were Tommaso's new neighbors. They all played table football and ping pong. They too were dressed shabbily, with American trousers full of shiny buttons, high belts and sweaters: but they were all very clean, dirty only a little on the back and front, not for work, but because they sat here. and wherever they happened, playing, they touched each other with dusty hands.

One, green so pale, with two black eyes that resembled an Arab prince, was looking ironically at a friend of his who was playing ping pong: «Do you have a house in Iacobacci», he said, «do you have a house? And go home!» He laughed a little, alone, chewing some gum. “You suck, you do!” he added.

Iacobacci was too busy playing to answer him. But as the ball fell and he bounced all the way to the bottom of the shed, bending down to pick it up, he said: "As long as you're busting my balls, Di Fa'!"

«And get up!» said the other boy. And he continued to calmly chew his gum. After a while he got up and approached his friend, telling him. «Now it's up to me!» «But yes, I haven't been playing for even five minutes!» he did this, raising his eyebrows and hugging his elbows to his chest, racket in hand. “If, five minutes!” Di Fazio said, grumbling, but suddenly sat down again, with his hands in his pockets. «Now let's do this hand, and you play,

eh?» Iacobacci said conciliatorily, quickly starting to play again, while his opponent was already getting pissed off.

Tommaso, beyond the wire fence, was watching.

He was there, a little stuffy, with his mouth half open and completely concentrated on thinking, while he was eating those little kids. Then he recovered a little: «What? Am I being a panhandler here?» he thought, but rather carelessly, because his heart felt very light.

Just to make an excuse that he was there behind the copper watching, he went slowly towards the toilet, entered it as if to do something, and stayed in there for a while working around. A straw was lit instead, looking out of the hut of dusty boards, below, the quarry, beyond a sea of meadows and countryside, and at the end, against the sky of an all the same, charged, yellow light, the neighborhoods of Rome. The sun had now almost set, but that beautiful light remained, clear as milk, fresh.

Tommaso rose again, and this time with a parable air he began to sneer at the boys in the courtyard of the rectory, trying to get them to observe him a bit. But they still didn't like it at all.

Now the ones doing the talking were the table footballers, babbling like little dogs. A blond man in short light blue shorts was shouting at his friend who was playing with him: «What, are you asleep? And, day, you know!»; and the one who was also a tall blond man, with hair sticking straight into his eyes and big lips, said, calmly and disgusted, knowing he had made a mistake: "He'll screw your balls!"

Meanwhile, one of the two opponents, silent and cheerful because they were winning, in a frenzy had thrown the ball back into the middle, shouting: «Come on, Romagnoli!»

Tommaso, looking, was all strung up, and his heart was beating. He understood that staying there, behind the net, like a beggar, was not okay. But he wanted to start a conversation with them and get to know us. He took a few steps up towards the church, and continued to look askance, while they hadn't even noticed him, except for the look given to him by that boy called Di Fazio, chewing his gum. Tommaso felt truly competent, or rather, a champion, both at table football and at table tennis: and therefore he watched with a detached air, with a half yawn, thinking of all the games he had played, and not just those! So now he could allow himself to stand there and watch, almost with the air of a protector, a little academic, with his hands in his pockets. But he couldn't say anything. He spoke all within

himself, to himself: and he spoke so much that it seemed to him that they must have understood him and that they had already met him with good reason: given that he too lived in one of those new and luxurious houses, like them. .

"He'd get me reprimanded," he was thinking, "so you know why they're pissing them off like assholes! Meanwhile, assholes, there they are! They don't think about anything, they play, if they have fun, if they're like students, pzt! And there's a dad who's having a hard time!" "Do you know that these guys," he continued to think, "that they don't do anything mean to each other... And that I know these guys for life? Yet there would be a mix of me among them! Damn death, I wish I had been trained like that too, I'm a good boy like them! »

But he thought all this, he didn't say it. They continued to get busy, playing, as if he didn't even exist, and he had never come there. Tommaso chuckled a little when he saw a naive shot from Iacobacci, which had sent the ball hitting the ceiling: but he chuckled with a calm, almost affectionate air, forgiving him, as one must forgive a newbie, and thinking about what the real game of pinge ponge, for those who know how to do it.

Meanwhile, an idea began to come to him. He thought about it and thought about it for a little while, all sullen, then he gave up and said to himself: "No, no...", getting even more annoyed.

He watched again, distracted: then he thought about it again, and said: "Why?" «I», he said to himself, «when I put my mind to something, it comes from them! I want to try, why?" A small doubt still arose in his mind: «What can I invent, though? You'll understand, it's a word!" «Aòh», he concluded, «I'll try, from bad to bad 'or I can even trouble..." He took a look towards the church, then calmly, as if he had already made the decision before, and there, to watching those who were playing, if only by chance, to pass the time, he went towards the main entrance.

The small courtyard in front of the church façade was also like that of the warehouses, with piles of gravel and lime, boxes and tools. Tommaso crossed it, and looking around, headed towards the door. He threw away the stub, coughed a little and went inside.

The little church was empty: there was only a woman with a bag near her knees, who was praying, resigned, as if she were a little ashamed of her requests to the Madonna or to some saint. Besides this woman there was no one else. Tommaso grimaced, saying to himself: "I don't know!", then he

remembered to cross himself: not praying, perhaps, because he remembered the Hail Mary only up until the "Lord be with you": but he did, just to show who had come in for something. Inside, the little church wasn't bad: all clean, with its rows of pews, the paintings along the white walls; it looked like the one in the cowboy films, with the so-and-sos, with the Protestants. Tommasino managed to get out, and looked around the little courtyard undecidedly, then he took the road down, on the other side of the church, towards the depths of the construction site, and went towards the rectory. You entered, there was a corridor, and on the starboard side an empty room, with two or three table footballs and some tools, with a sign on the door where it was written "Kingdom of Christ".

The corridor continued along the entire length of the warehouse, with doors along the newly whitened wall that looked like those of the changing rooms of a gym. There was no one. Tommaso walked forward indecisively, always saying to himself: "I don't know..." Finally two or three tough-headed men came out of the little door at the end, red and stout, and Tommaso said to him: "'Where is the priest?' "There," one said to him, leaving without looking at him. Tommaso walked forward and said, "Permission?"

The priest nodded at the door, looked at him seriously and said: "Come in." Tommaso, before his eyes, entered a small room, which faced the lawns with the wooden toilet. It was small, with a table, a shelf of about thirty books, two chairs and a camp bed, plus, of course, the crucifix, almost as big as the priest.

Outside, you could hear the screams of the kids playing in the courtyard, and all the voices of INA Case.

The priest looked at Tommaso sideways, as white as the rubble around the rectory. Tommaso was a bit stuffed up, but in front of a priest one more or less always manages to make himself look like him. «Allow me», he said, «father...» and, swaying a little in a mischievous way, he held out his hand: «Puzzilli Tommaso», he said. The priest took his hand with his fingertips and squeezed it gently. Tommaso was a good boy, a bit cheerful and a rascal, who, unfortunately, is a man, and, as a man, has his vices: gambling, smoking, women... "Sit down", the priest told him, that he still didn't know what he wanted, but he was used to these things. At first Tommaso wanted to refuse, as he wasn't that tired, then he took a look at the

chair, with an elastic gesture, and sat down, still elastically, huddling his shoulders. "Thank you!" he said.

Sitting down, he felt a little ashamed, because, sitting like that, tied to the chair, he was completely exposed to the priest's gaze: the brownish dress with white stripes, bought second-hand two years earlier, in Campo dei Fiori, the scuffed, hardened shoes, so faded that it was no longer clear whether they had been brown or red, suede or antelope, the shiny pedals, pushed in a little too far into the heel so as not to show that they had holes, the old shirt with a tie from the fourteenth century BC, from the times of the god of hunger. In such bad shape, Tommaso didn't know where to keep his hands, and, just to do something, he put out his cigarettes, blushing to the bone.

He still acted like a good boy, who, as a man, cannot resist his weaknesses: «Allow me, father...» he said, «it's a bad habit...» and meanwhile he uncertainly held out the package towards the priest, as if to offer him some, not knowing if he did so. the Gentile or if he offended him, since priests shouldn't have any vices.

The priest made it clear with a gesture that he didn't smoke, and meanwhile he looked around restlessly and seriously: he must have been ill, because under his sparse beard, his skin was white and grey, his eyes sunken, his little mouth as clear as a kitten's. He was small in stature, dry and sagging into his cassock.

Tommaso started smoking, all elastic. Usually he was affable and polite towards people with whom he had bad intentions. But now, since he didn't have any bad intentions, on the contrary, he had good ones, he was all stuck.

"Did you want something?" said the priest, as if he were struggling to speak, taken by other thoughts: perhaps the church he was building, down there, at the end of the blocks.

«Yes», Tommaso said immediately, «I wanted to talk about something important..."

"Tell me," said the priest, "if I can be of any use to you..."

"Well, if you're no use to me, you're a priest!" said Thomas. «I came to her on purpose..."

"What's this about?" he asked.

«Well...» said Tommaso, with a wrinkled forehead, shaking his head, «I don't know how it begins, aaa father...»

"Speak, what are you afraid of..." the priest said simply.

«Well», Tommaso decided. «I, father, would have decided to marry me to a girl... I also came to you for advice... Listen, father, if you would be kind enough to help me, explain to me, I don't know, what I should do ..."

"How old are you?" the priest asked him. «Twenty in November», said Tommaso. "But do you think you're taking things seriously," the priest then asked, "are you aware of what you're about to do?"

"Of course?" said Tommaso, shaking a little out of habit.

«This is the right path to take», the priest observed calmly, «which brings you closer to the Lord: you are young, and you could form a beautiful family... How old is your fiancée?»

Tommaso didn't remember Mecca's age well, he remained undecided for a moment, then said: "She's also twenty..."

«Your parents», asked the priest, «are aware... There are no obstacles between you...»

«No, no», Tommaso assured.

The priest remained a bit undecided, then tried: "Do you want to confess now?"

Tommaso stumbled: he wasn't expecting this: "Well, no, no..." he said, "it's better tomorrow morning, I'll come tomorrow morning... By the way, father, what papers do I need, for brides, what papers should I get out?"

"We need," the priest said politely, "the birth, baptism and confirmation certificates..."

“How should I go about hunting for all these certificates,” interrupted Tommaso, who was starting to lose sight of us anymore?

The priest explained it to him, as if it were a simple and natural thing: «Go to the parish where you were baptized, confirmed, and they will release them to you immediately... In total you will have to pay a thousand lire... And then you need the certificate of free status, that is that you are not already married..."

Tommaso smiled calmly, thinking: «If, if, I go all the way to Isola Liri, I'll give you some money!» «This», continued the priest, «go and get it released at the registry office, like the one at birth...»

Tommaso showed that he understood everything in detail, was interested and respectful: «Do I have time», he asked again, «to get all these papers out?»

«Nooo», said the priest, «hurry: in a few days you will have everything...»

That's it, there was nothing else to know from the priest regarding marriage: unless he also wanted to confess right there and then. But Tommaso was a little sorry to end that conversation so quickly. He made a pasty face, like a good son, and asked: "Father... do you think I'm doing well?"

The priest looked him in the eyes for a moment, then lowered his gaze: "Haven't you done anything with your girlfriend," he asked, "hasn't something happened to you?"

«Nooooo!» Tommaso blurted out, scandalized. «But don't think about it at all! What, are you joking? That's a good girl! I marry her because I want well..."

«Better, better», said the priest, with his head lowered, «everything is done in the grace of God...» And he lowered his eyes and remained silent. Then after a few moments, Tommaso, after having coughed a little, got up and started to leave, holding out his hand to the priest: «Goodbye then, father», he said, «if we see you in the morning... »

"Goodbye, son," said the priest.

Tommaso went out and went down the corridor, towards the door, completely satisfied, thinking to himself, almost aloud: "Nice, though, the pricey guy!"

He emerged cheerfully from the rectory, swollen and red in the face as if he had been drinking. Sniffing and coughing at him, he put his hands in his pockets and walked towards the lawn.

There between the puzzolana track, the church and the houses, in a piece of crumbled lawn, there was the kids' pipinara. It was now almost evening, the light came there as if from another world: the mothers began to call the children, and the first lights came on. Tommaso stopped to light a cigarette: it was the last one, and he no longer had a penny in his pocket. While he was there, that boy called Di Fazio came from behind the little church, alone. Tommaso looked at him and he approached him, removing a stub from a pocket in his trousers.

"What, are you mentioning to me?" she asked Tommaso.

Tommaso calmly handed him his lit cigarette, and the other man said seriously, without looking him in the face, "Thank you", and moved to leave.

"Tell me," said Tommaso, clearing his throat and coughing again. He turned around. Tommaso was all affable and a good boy.

«What», he asked, «are you marked, will you go there in church?»

«We are aspiring», said the other hastily, running his thumb under his forelock to fix it.

«Ah!» said Thomas. "What, do you live here?" he added.

«Back here», he said, «in Via Luigi Cesana».

"I live there," said Tommaso, as if a little bored, even though Tommaso hadn't asked him anything. When he showed him his house, Tommasino's heart started beating fast again: he gave a half yawn, and moved down the stink track, with the other who didn't know what to do, and wanted to cut due to the facts of he.

"Maybe I'll sign in there too," said Tommaso, pointing to the church.

The other, not knowing what to say to him, spat with a squirt, with a capricious air. Tommaso was completely satisfied with the intention he had announced. «Yes, I'll score», he thought, «everyone likes a track, table football, table tennis and everything else. I'll do you all, I'll do you! And it ends up that I become the boss in there, what are you? 'A bunch of assholes!'

They had come down from the lawn to Via Luigi Cesana, and from the parapet of a small terrace, to which other terraces joined through small steps, in front of the houses, climbing down the slope, a boy called: "To Marcellooooo!" Di Fazio raised his head to look at him, recognized him and ran away towards him, barely turning to greet Tommaso. Meanwhile, the other one had come down from the terrace, nicely dressed for the evening, with his gray trousers all ironed and his red sweater over his white shirt. He put his arm on Di Fazio's shoulder, starting to talk incessantly, and thus, hugging each other, they went down towards the center of the INA Case.

By now it must have been seven o'clock, and Tommaso went home. He went up: it was open. His mother was there, and she was waiting for him.

Tommaso hugged her, and she, hugging him, started to cry. Once she had calmed down a bit, but still crying, she took Tommaso to look at the house: there were two beautiful rooms, the kitchenette, the toilet, the terrace... In one room the father and mother slept, in the other Tommaso and his big brother.

What a night Tommaso spent! The most beautiful, one can say, of his life: because, even if he slept, he didn't sleep at all, but he was always a

little awake, and, thus, he could always think of being inside his house, a beautiful, large and comfortable house. rule of art, like that of the gentlemen.

2. SPRING AT INA CASE

The next morning, it was seven o'clock, and Tommaso was now up and washing himself in the toilet. A strong spring sun beat down on the INA Case. And, as if everyone had woken up early, there was a hubbub of voices, of songs, of screams, which seemed like midday.

Tommasino did all his things calmly, got dressed and put on his shirt and tie: he had now concluded that sweaters, t-shirts and all that stuff, so kid-like, mean-spirited, no longer belonged to a good boy with all papers in order. The shirt was old, all chewed on the edge of the collar, and the tie was a memory, you could no longer see what color it was, whether blue or purple: however, in front of the mirror hanging on the bathroom wall, looking at himself, Tommaso was quite equally satisfied.

Then, as he was about to go out, without a penny in his pocket, ready to tear up the entire road he had to travel, and which wasn't that short, his mother called him, and very happily said to him: "Come on a little." here, to Tomaso!", he took it next to the sideboard with the photograph of Tito and Toto on it, with their nice dresses, smiling half blinded by the sun, and took out a thousand lire that he had kept in his wallet during that month to give to him .

Therefore, as it turned out, Thomas was all a pope.

He arrived on the Tiburtina, and without looking anyone in the face, but all courteous within himself, he began to wait for the car together with the others, as if he had never dreamed of the need to instead go through all that walking. to Garbante: he had the money for the car, to go and return, and also a nice wad of money in his pocket.

As it was at Garbatella, he went straight to the market, which was in the middle of some old houses all perforated like chapels, under the scorching sun: he passed the various departments, and arrived at the fish department, smelly and in pain.

One of the stalls was next to a small fountain, and the fishmonger, at that moment, instead of shouting, like his colleagues, to the right and to the left, sweaty and paraguli: «I see ground gold, I see!», «Come on, I'm alive. !» and all, he was bent over the ice box, pounding it with a rolling pin.

«To Settì!» Tommaso shouted, looking at him, big friend.

Settimio raised his head, all shaved, with blue eyes. He was small and lively like a mouse, but, you could see at a glance, he must have been a

piece of bread, despite having that fine eye and those clothes of life.

«To Tomà», he said, getting up, his eyes shining like a light blue, «how are you in these parts?»

Zagajava a little, sometimes, because his father and mother, who were Jews, had been killed in a concentration camp by the Germans: and he had remained forever affected by the fears.

«Tell me, Settì», said Tommaso, as he shook his hand, «do you know a certain Irene, who lives in Via Anna Maria Taigi?»

“Irene?” said Septimius Augustus, thinking about it, all in the shadows.

«Yes, Irene. Her surname is Bondolfi, she's a little girl... stocky... with black hair... She's not pretty, in short, if she were... She's a homely woman...”

"I don't know," said Settimio, continuing to think about it and searching in all the nooks and crannies of his brain to see if this Irene would emerge.

"She has a friend, a basset hound, with a ponytail," insisted Tommaso, "who lives inside the lots in via Taiggi, at the C scale... I think she's called Negretta... »

Septimius brightened. «Aaaah,' to Negretta», he said, «Diasira! How, I don't know! I must have danced there a thousand times together!»

Tommaso was happy. He waited for Settimio to serve a lady who had come to the counter to buy half a kilo of anchovies, and said: "What, will you see tonight, tomorrow?"

«Right away, now, I'm leaving! I have to get through to the house!" said Septimius.

"Why?" he added, looking cheerful. “Do you need anything?”

Tommaso coughed a little. «Well, yes, he would like to put me back with Irene», he said, after thinking about it for a moment, «and you know how it is, for all the time I've been out... you understand what I want to say... no I've never written, not even a single line... In short, it's been more than a year since I learned Latin. How do you present yourself like this now? She would like to join an episode, please, with someone who would put in a good word!"

«And regular», said Septimius, looking at him attentively.

«Now, if you talk to this Diasira, and this Diasira talks to her, I find the terrain easy, afterwards, do you understand?»

"What, I'm not talking to you?" said Settimio, kneeling down to crush the ice in the box.

Tommaso took out a pack of cigarettes and offered some to his friend, and they began to smoke.

«Aòh», said Tommaso, «tell me that I'm back, that I want to be serious with her, that I want you well, and all these beautiful things, in short...»

"You don't think about it!" said Settimio cheerfully.

«And this evening I'm heading to the house, when I decide to buy some wine...» continued Tommaso.

"Sleep peacefully!" said Settimio, "if I speak, let it all out, it's a done deal!"

«I'll get back to you!» Tommaso said, looking a little dull, but with the satisfaction that melted him: everything was fine, and life was smiling at him.

"What are you doing now, working?" she asked Septimius after a while.

«Oh yes, work!» Thomas exclaimed. «What, am I a shotgun blast? I was foul-mouthed yesterday! I wish I worked! Let's hope to God that he can find me, he will work..."

Settimio puffed a little, stomping on the ice thoughtfully. As he was finished, he took and spread the ice over the fish which he put away for the next day. Then he said: «Aòh, if you want to work, take a walk down to San Paolo, there's work for everyone there!»

Tommaso looked at him, full of hope.

«We piazzaroli», said Settimio, «we have some friends at the Markets! If you listen to Tomà, I can talk to someone who can give you a boost!"

«What are you kidding? Save me!» said Thomas. «Magara!»

"Tomorrow, as it is, I'll have to deal with some errand boy, I'll go around the gabions, I'll always be a porter for someone".

"But what if he works hard?" he asked, all mellow, just for the sake of asking, Tommaso.

«Well, today, my son, they won't give you money for free! Eh!» She sold some mixed fried food to a woman and continued: "They'll keep you on trial, for two or three days... of course, if it happens, they won't chase you away anymore..."

Tommaso already knew roughly what the work at the market consisted of, but he listened to Settimio himself, who, getting busy at the counter, told him what it was about: he had to show up at the Markets around four in the morning, and, boss first, go immediately to the refrigerator to take the boxes of fish left over from the day before. Then he went to arrange the boxes in

the commission agent's department inside the fish booth. Around five or six the trucks arrived with fresh fish and positioned themselves in front of the shed: the new boxes had to be unloaded and placed together with the others. Then the sales began: the square sellers came and bought; and so they had to help them, moving aside the crates, weighing the ones they bought, and loading them onto wheelbarrows. Lastly, around ten-eleven, the remaining fish had to be returned to the refrigerator and the rotten one thrown into the sewer.

«Let's recommend it to the fish!» Tommaso finally said, very cheerful.

«Of course, let's move on to our category», added Settimio, «you will never die of hunger. Because everyone, gentlemen and wretches, is a fish!"

«Aaaa Tomà!» she then added, clapping a hand on his shoulder. «The future belongs to the young!»

Well, things didn't go as smoothly as Tommaso now thought: we know, as always on this earth, I write by hand and I write by the ass. But then, in the end, everything went swimmingly.

Irene now worked in a medicine factory, on Casilina, and left off a little late in the evenings. It took two or three days before Diasira brought Tommaso's message to Irene and then Irene's message to Tommaso.

As Diasira later said, laughing, Irene, as soon as she heard Tommaso's name, became very sullen, became very serious, stopped talking for a while, concentrating entirely on thinking about her own things, which we she knew how they were, and then she started speaking again, one or two words at a time, all compressed, sniffing so that she almost started to cry.

Despite trying not to let it show, and clinging to those half-said and half-unsaid things, and those sad facts that she knew and that had been depressing her for quite a while, she was very happy and excited that Tommaso had shown up again. . Two or three evenings after her, in fact, she waited for him, Diasira with her, as she left, at the exit of the factory: she was all prepared, with her white coat and earrings. As she saw Tommaso coming towards her, she became all melancholic and supported, but at the same time tender: they gently shook her hand, greeting each other like old friends.

The following Sunday, secretly from her parents, they went together into Rome. It was a truly beautiful Sunday, with a warm sun, so much so that we could already see companies going to Ostia. Especially around the station, where Tommaso and Irene arrived on the 11th, from Garbatella,

there was a mess of people, all of them just surviving. Tommaso had put away the sack that his mother had given him: he had only spent a little on trams and leisure, because, in the Markets, where he had already started to go to work, they still hadn't supported him with a lira.

They got off the tram in Piazza Vittorio and made their way up to Piazza Esedra.

Tommaso was all serious and grumpy, partly because he was too happy to be there, all in a tie, with the Mecca at his side, partly because, since the morning, he hadn't felt very well: given perhaps that the night, for the emotion of the following day, he hadn't slept a wink. He felt strange: he was sweating coldly, and his legs and his whole body were shaking a little, for who knows what reason.

Respecting, supported and attentive, his seriousness, Irene walked after him, staying just a little behind him and keeping one hand tucked under his left arm, half tucked into the pocket of his trousers. Tommaso was spitting, red as a chanterelle, with his right hand, strutting the woman for a walk.

But he wasn't feeling well at all: and as soon as they were next to the toilets in Piazza Vittorio, all decorated like two little Indian temples, he became even more annoyed. "Wait!" she said to Irene, and the latter, all melancholy closed in on herself, began to wait for him.

«What, am I in shit like Er Shitter, now?» thought Tommaso, pissed off at himself, as he was in the dirty little toilet on the corner of Piazza Vittorio. "What, I'll take one shot and die?" In any case, as he emerged, among all those cats in the flowerbeds, he already felt a little better, and started walking again as if nothing had happened with the mecca curled up.

"I'll tell you or I won't tell you", he thought, clenching his jaws: on the one hand he was very happy and proud at the news he wanted to give her, on the other he was getting cold, and almost, without wanting it, he was about to get a shock. half intending to download it already. Irene, on the other hand, thought about enjoying Sunday with her boyfriend, and that's it.

«Look how cute she is!» for example she said, seeing a little girl all pompous, she was walking holding her father in one hand and her mother in the other, both big babies with gold on. Or: «I really like these rugs!» she passing in front of some mattress shop. All like this. Inside, Tommaso was happy to have a girl who thought that way, like respectable and polite people: and he too agreed to find girls with bows and buns cute, and he agreed on the fact of bedside rugs.

So they arrived at Piazza Esedra: there was life there. Immediately at the beginning of the porticoes there was a ballroom, on the third floor, and in front of the door some young men in black prison clothes began to gather, and, in the middle, someone more classic, with blue and antelope shoes.

There also came, either with the boy or with the companions, some smandrapposa, some servant.

Further down there was the Moderno, a first-run cinema where you paid a whopping six hundred lire in the stalls: a little further on, under the porticoes, there was the Odeon, a small cinema full of soldiers and pischelli, where they made "The Woman of the River". Tommaso and Irene stopped to look out at the posters, to see if he would stick them: Irene's eyes immediately lit up with joyful surprise at the actress with her tangled trousers, and the handkerchief on her head and on top of a straw sombrero, who was cutting the canes with sickle. Behind you could see a beautiful lagoon, with calm waters under the dazzling sun.

«And, a good job, you know», she said warmly, since she knew everything about the films, «there's Sofia Loren and Rick Battaglia!» Tommaso was also looking at the posters, and Irene's enthusiasm attached to him. «'Let's go!' she said, completely determined and happy, coughing with emotion.

They quickly bought their tickets and took the route: Irene in front and Tommaso in back, who directed her with his hands on his hips, like a good boy who controls and protects his lead.

They found two seats, since it was still a little early, and they sat down, happy, watching the film: shortly after the lights came on for the end of the first half, they looked around: they were a really nice couple. And there were another seven or eight around them, in the audience. The soldiers and the boys, on the other hand, were having the usual banter, sprawled on their chairs: Tommaso looked at them with anger, almost with hatred. Compared to them he felt like a superior person, who no longer does those stupid things: if he was the mask, they could see: by that time he had already kicked them all out into the street.

But while he was thinking like this, a new attack of stomach pain came over him: little by little he became as white as a dead man, he felt like he was about to leave, that his guts were coming into his throat; his vision was blurry, and he almost hit his forehead on the chair in front of him. He

couldn't move much, even if he wanted to, because, during the night, small glands had also appeared on his neck and back, which hurt.

As soon as he recovered a little, with his head still dazed and a little foaming at the mouth, he grabbed Irene's hand, squeezing it so hard that he almost cracked half of it, all attached to her.

«To Irene, I have to tell you something...» he did as best he could to speak, seriously, in a whisper.

Irene, very excited, but without showing it, as if she had always expected that thing, turned a little towards him and looked at him.

«I don't know how it begins...» said Tommaso. «About what?» she said.

«Well, you see it, you know it», Tommaso began, «now I've seen you again, and over the past few days I've always had the same thing going through me to get things sorted out... That is, he would like to change his life... You know it, before I was a bit reckless... I never let you know, because I cared... But you understand, I had to behave like this, because, pzt, what, I was coming to tell you that I was a crazy head? I didn't tell you that I almost never worked... But you know that almost everyone from where I come from is like this, in the suburb...»

He was silent for a while, thoughtful, but revved up, all purple. Then he continued: "I felt I was loved by Irè, and if I told you the truth, I don't know how you would have behaved..."

“Mwell?” Irene asked, all attentive and sweet.

«Now», said Tommaso, «everything has changed... By now I have understood that I want to say that you are respected by everyone, that you are well liked... Look, the conclusion is this, you have understood me: I love you, and for 'What I want will change from what I know': I don't want them Tommaso anymore!»

«I know, Tomà», Irene said sympathetically, «that you have good principles, and then you didn't do anything bad to me, and after all, you see, it was a good thing that you told me 'you were making fun a bit... I know that all young men, even the good ones, do like you, the first few times...'»

«To Irè», said Tommaso, very happy at those words, «would you be willing to do serious things with me?»

Irene was too excited to respond so quickly. «Series... like series?» she said.

«If we get engaged at home!» Thomas exclaimed. «I come to talk to your father, to your mother... Let's do things as they should be done...»

«Well, to Tomà», said Irene. «If you feel like you love me...» But she couldn't continue anymore because she felt like crying.

Tommaso was also silent for a while, with a dumpling in his throat too: he put his hand on her shoulder and pressed her against him.

"Don't you know, Irene," he said happily, looking at her, "the other day I went to talk to the priest, and I told you my intentions!"

«For hunting and cards, what?» Irene asked, very sweet, soft and soft, her tongue almost not touching her teeth.

"Yes!" said Tommaso, "but I don't want anything, you know!" he added happily. «The birth certificate, the baptism certificate, the confirmation certificate, the state certificate... And there's not much to spend, you know! A thousand, two thousand lire, that's nonsense..."

But at that moment the lights went out again, and the film started again: Tommaso and Irene pressed against each other, holding hands, and began to enjoy it, like good people.

When they went out the weather was even more beautiful, the air sweeter. The sun was still high, and the whole of Piazza Esedra and Via Nazionale were full of light and noise.

Since Tommaso felt better than before, and his strength had returned, before going to the 11th stop, they took a short walk along Via Nazionale, to get some fresh air. They walked and looked around, at the shop windows, the people, all that luxury and that life.

They passed a little all-American bar, with windows full of the stuff Americans eat and drink, sitting on those high stools next to the counter. They passed a men's clothing shop, where an evening suit was displayed in a window, with the patent leather shoes, the white shawl, the black gloves, the cane; and, in the other window, a light dress, for walking, with brown moccasins next to it, and a red and black tie that had the seven beauties on it. Then in front of a shoe shop, a department store where there was everything, until step by step they arrived at the Exhibition, with the flights of white stairs illuminated by the sun.

But then, while walking, thrown there against the wall of a staircase that went down to street level, Tommaso suddenly saw a familiar face: he got a better look, and in fact it was Lello.

"What's going on there?" he thought, immediately sulking: in any case he refrained from greeting him, got even more annoyed, and went straight ahead, holding Irene by her waist, without her noticing anything.

«Nice, huh!» she said, alluding to the façade of the Exhibition, white as a daylight.

Lello, with his back against the wall, had his unhappy leg stretched out on the pavement, with his trousers pulled up, so that the footless leg could be seen: the sleeve was also turned up, to show the stump.

With this, he held a little boy of a year or two close to his chest: the other hand, the healthy one, he held out towards passers-by, to get alms.

Not even Lello saw Tommaso, because he didn't see anyone.

The little boy in his arms was very good, with a girl's dress, and a little face that was almost green, it was so pale, and black eyes as thoughtful as those of an elderly man. He looked at himself every now and then, to the right or to the left, a little curious about something, but he didn't show curiosity, and was content to flirt in silence.

Lello didn't even seem to notice he was next to him: he was renting him, and he kept him there like a thing, not a kid. And he already knew that, and he was fine.

What kind of change Lello had made since the days when he went to venture into Rome with his buddies! He had become worn out, thinner, even his hair, who once cared so much about taking care of it, no longer looked like his. His beard was at least six or seven days old, but it was light and sparse and wasn't very visible: but he was dirty, yes, and there was something like grease in his skin, something that exuded, which seemed like it wouldn't go away. not even with the bleach, it had been penetrating him for a long time now, like almost all the cripples, the cripples, his colleagues. The sturdy trousers he once had, when they were tube-style, the striped sweaters, the shawls knotted around the neck like sheriffs: nothing more: there was a pair of gray and tattered trousers, and a checkered jacket with swollen pockets, perhaps with food packaging inside.

He didn't ask for alms by complaining, or by looking at people with anger, with malice, like so many do: he did it as if it were a job, a habit, thinking of something else, with that scratchy face, forgotten by God.

"Take a coffee?" Tommaso said to Irene, expansive, all master of pocket and soul.

«No, let's walk! I like it!" said Irene softly.

«What a luxury in these parts, eh!» Tommaso said, throwing a last mangy look back at Lello and taking a long shot. «Here they have another way of behaving», he continued, «they are too different from us! From the

way they dress, even from the way they blow their nose, the way they sit down on a chair, you see I don't look like us... They have a different behaviour, there's nothing to do!»

«Well», said Irene, «these were born gentlemen! Have you seen when they have Fijians, if they do they call dad... mommy... They always take care of the kids, they don't even want the ant's milk... They make them study until they're grown up...»

"We all know about democracy," said Tommaso. "Here because!"

«What do you think», said Irene, «were we capable of finding ourselves in the midst of this environment? I really don't know!"

«I am too superior», observed Tommaso, «how can you compete with us! You see, before when I saw them I said fools, daddy's fiji, but now I'm starting to understand the difference between being among those from the village and being among these! These are people who make an honest living, and they take their hats off for any profit! »

Irene was silent for a while, meditating: «What do you know», she then said, «that one day we too, with a little good will, will be lucky and be able to make an impression on ourselves!»

Tommaso was also silent, fully intent, meditating a bit. «Do you know what I'm thinking about Irè?» he exclaimed. «I speak to the priest, and I too sign up for the Democratic Party!»

In Irene's house everyone was communist, and she too had always thought so, since she was little, as her father had taught her. She thought about it for a while, all optimistic and judicious, and then she said: «It's not a bad idea, Tomà! And then since he left tomorrow there can always be some help... some work... And then if one approaches the Church there is always another comfort!»

Even the following Sunday Tommaso and Irene met, to spend it together, like good engaged couples.

Tommaso, however, wanted Irene to come down to his area this time, to the INA Case: Irene made a fuss at first, saying that she was ashamed, that it was too far away, that it was up or down, but in the end she stayed there, too. ultimately happy to come down, perhaps to see Tommaso's mother and father, despite the fact that Tommaso hadn't said a word to her about it.

This was a not so beautiful Sunday, with all the clouds in the sky, gray, that you couldn't see a ray of sun even if you paid for it in gold: it

threatened rain but it didn't rain, and the cold breeze that occasionally blew through all that grayness was freezing, it made the glow plug come.

Even that day Tommaso didn't feel as God commanded: he was numb from the cold air, which in the end didn't have to be cold, given that the other boys were going away calmly with their t-shirts and light clothes, which they had now begun to wear, and I decided to keep them even if it snowed, if necessary: and they didn't shiver at all. Tommaso was trembling, however, and even had a bit of a cough. So he was black, while he waited, in front of the INA Case, on Tiburtina, for the car that was supposed to take Irene.

He stood huddled with his hands in his pockets and his collar turned up, swearing to himself at every car that passed and Irene didn't get out. Finally here is Irene, all dressed up, with her new red dress. She got out of the car and came quickly towards Tommaso, with a jog, a little breathless, to make up for the delay. But Tommaso didn't pay much attention to it, because you know, these are things that happen between engaged couples: he took her by the arm and led her up Via di Pietralata, turning under Monte del Pecoraro, towards the Lux cinema.

He walked ahead, a little serious and concentrated, with his hands in his pockets, pale from the cold, and she walked a little behind, with her hand tucked under his arm.

At the Lux there was a film with Totò, and Tommaso and Irene went to have a laugh. They stayed there for more than two hours, because they wanted to watch the first half again. When they finally rose again, the air was even colder and duller, but there were many people around, entire families going to pizzerias, soldiers who didn't know what to do, children from Pietralata who went to the cinema in Tiburtino, and children from Tiburtino who came to the cinema in Pietralata.

Now Tommaso and Irene were walking, hugging each other, tightly. He had taken her under her waist, she was quite plump, and held her tightly, as if she were afraid that she would fall. They were silent and silent as engaged couples are, going step by step where they have to go.

Tommaso, having walked all the way down the Via di Pietralata and onto the Tiburtina, had become very painful from holding the girl so tightly, holding her as if he were feeling ill. But he wouldn't have left even if the guards came. Those who passed looked at them; and, if they didn't do it, Tommaso, jokingly and pretending to think about something else, looked at

them sullenly and sourly until they took a look at the couple. And Tommaso then went away looking ahead, completely busy holding up the mecca. Someone, a fljo de 'na slut, as soon as he passed by, made a few outbursts: "What, is that the beginning of ivy?" Or: «All glue!», or even the old one: «Don't listen to me!» But Tommaso and Irene didn't let them go, and more and more sad and collected they continued on their way.

Usually couples from those parts went down the Tiburtina, after Tiburtino Terzo, towards the Aniene: after two or three hundred metres, a good while before arriving at the Ponte Mammolo, there was a small bridge on the road: next to this, a small path almost sheer down the slope, towards the countryside, near Via delle Messi d'Oro. The countryside there was beautiful, all green, full of wheat, fruit trees, vegetable gardens full of cauliflowers, fennels, turnips, amidst piles of stables and clumps of olive trees. However, where the path led was to a sort of reed thicket, thick with tall reeds, a little smelly, between two cultivated fields. It was long, reaching up to the height of Pietralata, and narrow. Couples went there to get wet. And in fact, together with the sghecie, the filth and the mud, you could see here and there the bunks that were made with newspapers.

Tommaso and Irene, with their clothes all soaked in the damp, went slowly down the path, along the reeds. Tommaso felt colder and colder, and was coughing and getting pissed off: but by now it was decided that they had to go to the swamp, and that was how it had to be: he didn't even think about doing without it at all. They arrived at a point where they were alone, and they sat down on a damp patch of tall grass, among the reeds as inert as beams, with the leaves shining.

As they sat down, Tommaso held Irene by the hips.

"Are you comfortable, are you okay?" she made them. "Yes," Irene reassured him.

«Come close to me, you'll pull further!» Tommaso said, grabbing her arm as she no longer felt it because of her pain.

She let him hold her, resting her cheek on his shoulder, and Tommaso began to kiss her: one kiss, two, on the mouth. But he was uncomfortable, and he stopped a little, making himself better: «Close your eyes». he said to her, "don't you know that when someone is with her eyes open you mean she's thinking about something else?"

Irene sweetly shrugged her shoulders a little: Tommaso began kissing her again, starting to do it with as much ardor as he could, with all his

feelings. He began to rough her up, to give her a few tongues. But he had to unbalance himself, sitting crookedly on the floor, and his back hurt.

“Aòh, soak it up,” he said to her, straightening up, “what are you doing?”

«And, all wet, Tomà», said Irene, «I get all plastered... Let's get up, it's the same, right?»

«But which one is standing?» Tommaso snapped. «We're fine like this... Wait a bit...»

He got up, took out his handkerchief, and with the handkerchief in his hand he looked around: a little further on, behind two cane stubs, there were some pieces of packing cardboard, apparently brought there by someone else: he took them and he laid them out on the floor, and even put his handkerchief on top, because they were damp.

He started kissing her again: but they still weren't feeling well, having nowhere to lean, with their long legs on the wet grass.

«Aòh, what, are you a nail tycoon?» said Tommaso, who was already starting to get nervous. He felt that he wasn't getting horny at all, and he took it out on her. Without further compliments, he started to push her down, make her stretch back onto the grass: "Put it down, put it down!" he told her, already out of breath, overcome by a chest attack. But Irene resisted resolutely, saying: "No, no, to Tomà!" So Tommaso let it go for the moment: but in the meantime he began to reach under her skirt. «Pull up your robes...» he said to her, «come on, pull up your robes...» And meanwhile he pulled them up on her, slowly, over her knees, up to her thighs.

“It would magnate me!” he muttered to himself, grasping with his hand that white, white meat that he fed to his brain.

«Shock off this fence, damn it!» she then said, going with her hand on her belt, "that doesn't do anything to me..."

He couldn't untie the belt, with his hand shaking from the orgasm: and, with the belt tightened, he couldn't pull up her skirt as he wanted.

Her legs were already all out, with her stockings held up by garters. Irene kept them stretched out and together, looking at her toes, partly to show that she had them straight.

Tommaso kept one hand on her thigh, where the stocking ended, and the other began to insert it, under her neck, into her hair. She was quiet for a

while, then she began to get excited. «No, no, no like that, not there, not there, stay still...»

With his hoarse voice Tommaso said to her, in a breath like her: "I've found the weak point, eh?" And he continued to smooth his head under her hair, smiling.

She, continuing to fuss and shield herself, said: "Give me the comb..."

"Later, later..." Tommaso promised her, "there's no need to be afraid, I'll give it to you later..."

Meanwhile he had started looking down between his legs again, with a lump in his throat: «Aòh», he slurred, «take your panties down...» And seeing that she immediately became mushy, he anticipated her: «You don't have to take them off ... a little bit..."

"It's cold," said Irene, annoyed, "and then, what are you doing?"

"Nothing!" said Tommaso, still hoarse. «What do I have to do? I wasn't afraid, I don't even touch you... I want to get satisfaction..."

Without waiting for Irene to respond, slowly, delicately, like a trainer with the beast, he took her panties from above the elastic: then he lifted them a little, heavy as they were, so that they could be removed from underneath, and pulled them down.

«What beautiful thighs, hard!» he said to her, "my soul!"

She began to lower his garter as well. «What, you want to strip me naked?» Irene said. «This is good, this is good», said Tommaso. "That's enough..."

He began to hold her again, holding her hands between her, biting her neck, and murmuring to her, who was almost crying: "My soul..."

But he still wasn't well-fed, something that by that time one would usually have already had two certificates for. «But damn him!» he thought to himself, already foaming at the mouth with anger. Irene had half eaten her, with kisses, bites and tongues. «What the... is happening to me? How is it, I don't get horny?" she always thought to herself, trying to joke about it.

He took Irene by the tits and squeezed them so tightly that she almost cried. He made her push them out of her, and began kissing and licking them.

"Okay, it's been a long time since I've been with a woman!" she thought. «What do I care about her, damn her! Maybe it will be cold..."

He felt another attack in his chest, he put his hand against Irene's shoulder, and pushed her down with all his strength, forcing her to lie down on the wet grass. «And put it down, and stretch it!» he told her angrily.

«You're going to make a mess all over me... And, all wet on the floor...» Irene complained, trying to get up.

«If you get wet, it's not the end of the world, you know! Then you dry off! »

He held her down, making hickeys on her neck, kissing her, now all over her.

«Aòh, do something too! Move a little!"

Irene began to get busy, kissing his neck, touching his hair and holding him tightly. They stayed like that for a while, packed together, piled high enough to make a grave.

"Darnit!" thought Tommaso, «but how is it? What did I do?"

Suddenly he soaked it, and got up, sitting down on the turf as before, on top of the all-soggy cardboard. He put his hand in his pocket, took out the pack of cigarettes, took one with his fingers that were shaking, lit it, after spitting out two or three puffs of tobacco that had stuck to his lips, and began to smoke.

Irene, completely subdued and resigned, got up from the soaked grass, wiping her back, looking at him sideways: and he was nothing, he wasn't even looking at her, flaming with his wrinkled forehead and his poisoned eye, white from the cold. Finally Irene decided to say something to him: "What's wrong with you?" she said, heartfelt and with a bit of controversy in her voice.

Tommaso looked at her. "I don't have anything," he said. He was silent for a while, blowing away the smoke, then added: «It's you who's changed! »

Irene fell from the clouds, immediately becoming annoyed, and replied: «Have I changed? I'm always the same... I'm exactly like this, don't you remember?"

«And yet when I met you you were different!» Tommaso insisted, acidly.

Irene was bunching up her clothes, which were all a mess. She stopped. «But look, I'm always the same!» she exclaimed, already with a little tearfulness in her voice.

«No, no, no», said Tommaso, shaking his head, with a crooked little mouth, «it's not what you say! Don't fool me, there's something to it, I'm not wrong..."

"But why?" said Irene, "what do you want? It doesn't seem to have changed to me... My life is now marked, it's always the same... The only difference was that before I didn't work, while now I work! Like this, my work didn't affect me..."

Tommaso was silent for a while with his elbows resting on his knees, hunched over; his forehead was all wrinkled and his eye was dark as he thought.

«And how did you get into this place where you work?» he asked all at once, glaring at her.

Irene explained, a little jokingly, despite the melancholy of the situation: «'A family near my house has a nephew who is a driver who transports medicines, and he spoke for me as a doctor..."

«And with all this», Tommaso interrupted him, «have you done anyone any favors?»

Irene didn't even want to understand what Tommaso was alluding to: she blurted out: "It's someone like me who wants me to give pleasure to someone who's doing well..."

"The pleasures that a woman can do, no one can do," said Tommaso.

Irene looked at him: she took her bag from the fray grass, cleaned it a little, and made the act of getting up: her pussy was shaking and she was almost crying, but she was determined to stop the discussion and leave.

«'We're home...'» he said.

"No, you stay here!" Tommaso said to her, holding her wrist and forcing her to sit down again, which almost made her fall. "You owe me," he continued, grinding his teeth, "everything you've done since the evening when I came to your house to serenade you, up until today after lunch!"

Irene resigned herself to giving all these explanations, sad, offended, but calm, because she knew that her conscience had been cleared. «For me it's enough that you say just about one day», he said, «because for me the others have all been the same... And then there's no need for me to tell you, since you know what it is anyway. the path I take..."

Tommaso became angry: «My name is Tommaso on purpose, I know», he said, raising one hand with an open palm and striking the palm with the thumb of the other hand, forcefully, «for what! For eighteen months I was

in the dark about everything, you know, on your behalf! And I don't sleep while I'm standing up, you know, you owe it to me to lay the cards on the table!"

«I don't understand you», said Irene sadly, «you talk to me like that... but why? What did you understand? What, they told you something, tell me..."

"So," said Tommaso, "tell me a little: how old is this nephew, the driver?"

"But he's married!" Irene exclaimed. «C'ha moje e fiji grande! And then he knows my family, he held me in his arms as a little girl..."

"And you're a doctor?" Tommaso interrupted him.

"I've never seen him, I don't even know what he's like!" Irene said.

«And tell me a little!» Tommaso continued, «but at the pharmaceutical one there, you're all women, what? I don't know the men?"

"The men are in another department," Irene explained, "there are the porters..."

Tommaso jumped and looked at her face furiously: "Do you see it?" he shouted. "Now, would you like to tell me that you played Maria Goretti for more than a year, haven't you ever spoken to anyone?"

"What does that have to do with anything!" Irene said vibrantly. "Yes, yes, I'm a woman... And then I didn't even have that much acquaintance with you... And who would have imagined that you would come back to me..."

Tommaso got on his knees with his face against Irene's face, with his mouth folded and his teeth protruding like those of carrion: "Now you see it!" he shouted, "there's something!"

"Well," said Irene, almost trembling, "someone who tried to start a conversation with me, but there was nothing to be done..."

«But you listened to me», Tommaso blurted out, drooling, «you stopped to talk...»

«Yes», Irene admitted, «like that, but...»

Tommaso didn't let her finish: he was already ready, and he delivered a blow to her cheek that almost turned her head.

At first Irene didn't understand how: she looked at him uncertainly, scared. Then she put her face in her hands and started to cry, softly.

«You cry, eh, I'm happy!» thought Tommaso, worried, looking at her standing in front of her.

It had gotten dark, almost: there was already shadow among the reeds. In the silence, while Irene was crying, distant voices and cries could be heard, and people singing: perhaps they were companies of young men who were returning home along the Tiburtina, and other young men, further away, who, hearing them, made fun of them and they were making raspberries, laughing loudly. With the evening, the air was less cold, because the breeze no longer blew as before: it was almost warm, amid the dew that dripped on the nettles.

After a while, Irene stopped crying, got up with her bag in her hand and walked away. In silence, Tommaso followed her, lighting another cigarette, still all confused. They went up the path, which could barely be seen like a light blur, among the torn fences, the reeds and the piles of weeds. They climbed up with difficulty, because they slipped in the mud, up their necks up to the Tiburtina, and headed step by step towards the car stop.

They walked in silence, along the street which was full of cars with their first lights on, and groups of friends coming and going, pushing each other, arguing, laughing.

After a hundred steps, while Tommaso was walking grumpily with his hands in his pockets, Irene, with the excuse of running a finger inside a shoe that was squeezing her and hurting her, stopped: to hold herself up, with a small grimace, she held on to Tommaso by the elbow. Then she, starting to walk again, continued to timidly hold his arm with her swollen, red hand.

Tommaso let it go, still silent, with his face red with anger and emotion. He went on like this in silence for a while longer, and finally said, in a hoarse voice: "What, are you deaf for the car?"

"Yes, I have it," Irene said quickly, with an expression of relief in her eyes, almost starting to cry again.

They remained silent for a bit longer, they walked a few dozen metres, and Tommaso slurred: «Irene, you knew me the way I did... I don't know whether it's clear to you or not, but I have I owe you something to say, because I don't feel like it exploding inside me!"

He was silent for a while, moved by his words, and continued: «Look, I'm not one of those who scratch their horns with their hand! Get this straight in your head! When I get attached, I really get attached, I don't get attached for a day or two!... I did all this bullshit to you, this little novel, because I feel like a good girl... If I wasn't thinking of you for nothing, I

was satisfied with what you gave me... What came out with you was all junk: and what did I care! »

Irene listened in religious silence, understanding everything that Tommaso wanted to say: "You know," she also finally said, moved, half-breathed, "I love you too!"

For the entire time they were at the bus stop, under the shelter at the entrance to Tiburtino, they remained silent, huddled as usual, apart among the people who were waiting like them. Then the bus, half empty, because the terminus was two stops ahead, arrived, and Irene got on: they said "hello" "hello" to each other, just barely, as if everything was settled between them, there wasn't much need for words. . Tommaso stood still until the bus was far away, then he looked around, and, still all red in the face with excitement and his eyes burning, he put his hands in his pockets, and, slowly, slowly, without haste, he went towards Monte del Pecoraro, in front.

Even before, passing by, he had noticed the movement: there were some kids playing a game, and his friends galore on the slopes.

Tommaso also went and sat down, on the wet and dirty grass, behind the door, among his companions. He was sitting there calmly, given that he had just left the woman: but he still didn't feel well, he was all burned and had a cold sweat.

The Jackal, who was broadcasting the game on the radio, standing with his palms in his skull and grinning, stopped, opened his mouth as wide as it could go, stood still for a while, then, with a movement of his gargling, he made a noise, as if he were warbling.

Another from Tiburtino, a friend of his, specialized in broken goods, called Er Paziente, gave a small demonstration, to give him a moral slap, making three or four in a row: everyone looked at him, recovered from their faith in life, after the after-lunch spent without a lira, rubbing his butt on the dirty grass or on the bar seats.

But already the kids playing football had gotten bored, all of a sudden, and were acting nice, cutting down towards the village and arguing. It was already really dark, and the light that was still brimming under the mountain was purple. "I'm going to bed now," thought Tommaso, "and what am I doing here?" But singing in a tuberculous voice, at the top of his lungs, he was advancing towards Ponte Mammolo, a crippled old man, blind from the tropea.

«To Cunappa!» the comrades all shouted happily, running away from him, who were already about to bite him too: "Come on, Cunappa, so you can attack us with some crabs!"

They knew him because he was a watchman at a warehouse in San Basilio, where they had been going for cuckolds since they were kids. However, Cunappa neither saw nor heard them. He went straight away, tottering in fits and starts, with his knees buckling, weak, and every moment he was about to hit his lump against the pavement. His greasy gray trousers were as wide as skirts, and his jacket was lost right up to his knees, with the pockets busted open. He had a hat pulled down over the bridge of his nose, ancient, old, and fat that if you squeezed it you would get fat.

His presence cheered everyone up: even Tommaso. "To Cunappa," they shouted. «To Spy! Come here, come here, I'm yours now! You're going to die tonight!"

They had lined up, legs apart, on the ravaged slopes of the mountain, as if to be reviewed. Suddenly, without warning, the old man, Cunappa, the Spy, tac, sat down: on the worn edge of the sidewalk, which was all mud. He stood there, swaying, red as death, munching in the bags of his jacket that stank three kilometers away.

«Spy», the Patient shouted at him, «you lived before, eh? You had someone licking your feet!" Then with a disgusted look: «But when they're waiting in prison, these idiots, drunkards, who only annoy people!»

The old man looked grimly at the Patient: who knows how, he had understood him, and was observing him: it was clear that he couldn't distinguish him well, in the shadow of the mountain, among the other devils, in that drool of palombine light, among where the street lamps had already come on.

«I have to eat, I have to eat!» she said, or some other word like that, sounding like she had a piece of tire in her mouth.

«What are you great about? Bread and lice?" asked the Jackal.

This time the old man managed to utter only one word, loud and loud. "Fish!" he shouted, as if his tongue was hot, spitting.

In fact, he managed to push out of his pocket a paper bag of newspapers picked up in the mud, which only made one's stomach churn just looking at it.

"What, is there fish in there?" they asked him kindly, inquiring.

Speaking with his nose, with his ass, with his ears, with his ass, the old man, laughing very satisfied, said that he had picked it up in the square the day before, and was keeping it for dinner.

The Patient, with a balding head, a pointed scalp, a greasy face that looked like it was made of eggshell, approached him: "Look at this jacket for a while," he said, "yes, it fits me well! »

Without the old man being able to do anything about it, because they could dress him and dress him like a creature, he took off his jacket and put it on himself. He wandered around a bit, spirofating, acting like a clown, among everyone who was breaking their jaws, then off he went, straight up the little road of Monte del Pecoraro, dark, brown, with the corpse of the light that barely reached us from the headlights of the Tiburtina. And the others followed, emptying themselves. The old man picked up the parcel that had fallen to him like a junk, and he too started running after the Patient and the others, shouting: «Give me my ciacca! 'A ciaccaaa!'

The others had themselves taken back to the top of the mountain, among the humps all strewn with fresh dead, which smelled like a pleasure. Even Tommaso, although he felt weak, ran up laughing with them.

Then the old man arrived, panting as if he were spitting out lungfuls. But he didn't realize it. He sandpapered angrily, as if he were speaking through someone else's mouth: "A ciacca, 'a ciacca." He didn't know who he was talking to. Maybe he didn't even see, like when someone turns to some saint to do him a favor. And he continued to insist, as if a stake had been shoved down his throat: «'A ciacca, 'a ciacca!»

The Patient continued to spit with his jacket reaching down to his heels. Then he stopped suddenly, concentrated and let out a fart. The old man standing there kept screaming his guts out.

«Tie!» the Patient said to him, approaching him: he took off his jacket, nauseated, because it stank, and, like the little boy, silent because he had been heard by the saint, he reached out to catch it, the Patient, laughing, shouted: «Put it away!» and he threw his jacket away, which, with a trail of stench, fell against the electricity pylon. Without looking anyone in the face, as if he were following a living person, Cunappa chased after his jacket, and dove down, under the pylon, to pick it up.

Half yawning, with his mouth crooked, and an expression of pleasure on his face, Tommaso said to himself: «Let me have some at home, go! Let me

go to sleep! Now I'll stick myself under those sheets", continued Paragulo, "and I'll sleep like crazy!"

He was about to cut, when, at that moment, laughing like an ape, he threw himself on old Nazzareno. The old man was hanging on his jacket: Nazzareno took him by the belt and began to tear his trousers. «Let me try it a little, these bighi are like me!» he said. "What, did you buy it from Schubert?" The old man tried to resist, as if now it was some evil soul from purgatory who was making him despair: but Nazzareno turned him over onto his stomach and pulled his trousers off his slain legs. The Patient took the jacket back, and threw it into the air again. The old man no longer knew whether to run after his jacket or after his trousers: in the meantime, however, the first thing he did was pick up the fish bag again, and started running here and there again, this time shouting: "The clothes, the clothes!"

«Damoje fire!» cried the Jackal. «Hunt the camera!» he shouted to a companion. He quickly took out the machine. «Everything, everything, let's burn everything!» Nazzareno shouted inspiredly.

They made a pile of the jacket and trousers: and while two or three held the old man tightly by the arms, the others ended up undressing him, laughing like sluts. Disgusted by the stench, they threw the shirt, the lumpy sweater, the underwear, the cap and the shoes onto the pile. They left him only the pedals: then they pushed him aside, naked like his mother had made him, with all that white hair, and set the fire. The little boy was watching, lanky, and instead of shouting something, he was moaning, illuminated by the tongues of fire that sent his clothes burning. «The fish parcel!» Nazzareno shouted, cutting off his laughter: he picked up the paper and threw that into the fire too. Then one began to run away down the mountain, blocking his nose with his fingers: "The stink!" he shouted. Everyone followed him, running through the bushes of the mountain, down towards the Tiburtina, screaming and busting their guts with laughter. They ran away scattered, down among the black humps of the mountain, on the mud, the heaps of fracid heaps, like a pack of old jackals. Tommaso, too, ran away and laughed: but he was getting sicker and sicker: the little glands on his neck were gnawing at him, his face was all red, bruised, and he felt cold, with everything running around, as if he had a fever.

3. WHAT WAS TOMMASO LOOKING FOR?

From that day on, Tommaso always continued to feel a little strange, especially in the evening: around four or five in the afternoon, he felt too hot, burnt, and at the same time had cold shivers. It wasn't that he felt bad at all, he felt strange, that's all. So he continued as if nothing had happened: he still went to work at the Markets, to be a fishmonger, as soon as it became light, and stayed there until late in the morning. Then he would go for a nap, and he would wake up vomiting and freezing. Screaming at his mother, she got dressed and went off about his business, up and down the village, with her friends.

Precisely at that time the pink postcard had arrived: it was the time he had to go and become a soldier.

He showed up one morning at the district, in Via della Greca, for the visit, with Zucabbo, Minchia, the Jackal and the others of his age: they stripped naked, and one by one they went into the little room to be examined. All were more or less made fit immediately. Instead they sent Tommaso to the Celio, because they had found something that didn't convince them, and there they sent precisely those who needed to be examined better.

A few days later he showed up at the Celio: here they gave him a well-examined examination, x-rays and everything: in the end they told him a word that he had never heard, that is, that he had something in his lungs, which caused those glands to and that he had to immediately go into health insurance and get treatment. Tommaso didn't understand: he said, a little worried, a little mischievous: "I don't know!" In short, he asked for a better explanation, and they told him, in conclusion, that he was tubercular, and he had to go to Forlanini immediately.

Immediately, it was a word. She had to ask a load of questions, Social Security, this and that, and wait a week, a month, two.

He didn't say anything, to Irene, to anyone. It all seemed stupid to him: and everything made him angry, it got on his nerves and that's it. He went to the Forlanini, yes, because he had to go there: but he was doing very well there, so sure was he that he had nothing, which was something that had to last from Christmas to Boxing Day, because he wasn't there with tuberculosis, and there had never been.

He arrived at the Forlanini one evening, around five o'clock, on the thirteenth, which from Acqua Bullicante led right up there, to Monteverde Nuovo: his mother and he got off, went along some new avenues, and arrived in front of the entrance to the Forlanini : a barred gate, with a sort of guard post next to it, like in a barracks. Behind you could see all the gardens, trees, and at the end a large building, full of columns, as big as a theatre.

Tommaso started to enter impatiently, strung up, with his mother who was almost crying behind him, going down towards the colonnade at the end of the flowerbeds. But an usher stopped him, rudely, and told him to wait. Tommaso, blowing, lit a cigarette. The usher went to call a young man, who was the doctor on call, who calmly ascertained whether Tommaso was in order, whether he had the admission letter from the Social Security and all that. Tommaso knew it was all right, and he was waiting with his nerves, putting on a patient face.

From the entrance, they sent him to the Bursar's office: an usher accompanied him. They crossed the entire garden, where at that moment they could smell the gas from the Permolio, with the flame glowing red in the sky, red from the sunset, a little further down, behind the Trastevere station. They entered the colonnade, and wandered for about ten minutes through halls, entrances, stairways, corridors and corridors, then they came out into another garden, in the shape of an exedra, at the back, and, at the end, already on the opposite side, onto the Via Portuense, there was the Bursar's office.

With his mother following him, who didn't say a word, Tommaso went inside and found himself in a small room that looked like a post office, where registered letters and telegrams are sent: there someone looked at his papers, asked him for his personal details, and, in the end, he gave him his registration number to go to the Reception department.

This, he explained to him, was just outside, at the beginning of the horseshoe garden: it was the first pavilion of the men's department: a large, tall building, with one side completely full of verandas. He went there, grumpy, impatient, angry, always with his mother close by, who was silent, bundled up in her clothes which had been her good ones for ten years now.

Inside, again, corridors, stairs and windows: he wandered back and forth a bit, without meeting anyone, increasingly losing patience. Finally he saw a nun, and asked her acidly: "To mother, where should I show up?" She

showed him a little door on a corridor along the garden, and she went the other way.

Behind this little door there was an office, with a beautiful head nurse, wider than long, with eyes like a prankster: this was where all Tommaso's visits ended. He had to stay in that pavilion for observation for a few days. The head nurse, having rechecked all the documents, prepared to take him in his place, to the room that had been assigned to him.

She was a little quiet, because the moment had come for Tommaso to say goodbye to his mother, and she had to leave. At first she, frightened, didn't understand it: the nurse herself had to tell her. Then Sister Maria gave her son a desperate, uncertain look. "I say hello to Tomà," she said in a low voice. "Be well!" She hugged him tightly, and if he didn't cry it was almost there: she turned immediately, and wiping her eyes with her handkerchief, she took it and went into the garden, taking the wrong path two or three times, and walking quickly, all ashamed.

The head nurse, when they were alone, said to Tommaso: "This way", and led him towards a corridor that opened onto another small internal garden, full of benches under slightly worn plants: he didn't even take two steps and they were already arrived in front of a metal door, below, and glass above.

He pushed him, and made Tommaso pass. It was a dormitory with six beds, one next to the other, with a window at the end overlooking the garden along Portuense. Some patients were lying on the beds, elderly, gray in the face, dry as finches, with long beards.

Tommaso's bed was the first upon entering, next to the door: the one after that was empty. "Here, here, settle in," the head nurse told him. But Tommaso couldn't understand it. He couldn't get it into his head that this was his place, his bed. "You have a bedside table," the head nurse told him, "and a wardrobe." In fact, against the wall in front of the beds, there were six small white iron cabinets attached.

"Dinner is in an hour," the head nurse told him, and quickly left to sort out her other affairs.

Tommaso remained there like a tawny owl, with the bundle in his hand. One of the patients, from his bed, said to him: "Put the stuff down." "What are you bothering about," Tommaso said to himself, blackly, "fuck you...!" But, little by little, he began to remove what little stuff he had from the bundle, and put it inside the wardrobe, which was narrow, small, but still

remained almost empty. Once this was done, Tommaso had nothing left to do. There was nothing else to do but wait, there in that little corner of the hospital, half out and half in, with those other frail tuberculosis people nearby.

By now evening was beginning to come, and as the light faded, the beds seemed whiter. Not a sound, a voice, nothing could be heard.

So, Tommaso spent an hour, lying on his bed, with his hands under his head, thinking about his horns, in a state of torment. «But look where I have to find myself!» he thought. «In the midst of all these plague victims! How the f... am I supposed to fight this? Here I have to kill someone!"

Then, following the others, who could get up, he went to dinner: the refectory was at the end of the corridor where the head nurse's office was. It was a large thirty by forty room, filled with an expanse of large metal tables. More than five six hundred sick people gathered there for dinner.

After eating, Tommaso, who didn't know anyone, returned to his little corner, inside the dormitory, and although he wasn't sleepy, angry, hydrophobic, without even looking at the others who were with him, he got under the blankets.

He was ill, but he didn't know if he was actually ill, or if it was the madonnas he had. Two or three times he was on the point of taking the things and leaving, returning home: "But whoever does it to me, stay here, damn him!" he thought. "What, am I like these?"

Then he held back, but his anger and contempt for those others and that place increased. He was lying still, looking at that high, white ceiling, which didn't even look like a ceiling, it felt like he was outside, in the corridor or in the garden: that wasn't a place to sleep.

Finally, after a long while, he fell asleep and fell asleep. But it was as if he were not sleeping: he was dreaming, and, at the same time, he was almost awake, with all the feelings.

Little by little, little by little, he seemed to be out of the hospital, in the open air, in the sun, as healthy as he had always been.

He was at his home, not in Via dei Crispolti, at INA Case, but in the old house in the village of shacks on the Aniene.

«Aòh, but I'm not here anymore, aòh!» Tommaso protested, almost crying, "I'm not here anymore!"

It was a beautiful day, with a clear sky, from which a gentle, although a little too strong, light descended into the earth. No matter how hard

Tommaso tried, he couldn't see the countryside beyond the river nestled between the banks and the hills, everything seemed to end just behind the village shacks. These, however, extended much further than usual, as if it were a whole big city of hovels, muddy little spaces, crates, rotten pallets, stakes and cords with rags hanging out in the sun.

The light coming down from the sky, however, made everything bigger, cleaner, and almost majestic. The little walls of leaf brick, the roofs of strips and tar paper, the sandwiches of frosted wood, light with old age, everything seemed to be made of a magnificent material, and shone beautifully clear in the light.

Tommaso's shack looked like a palace: on the bench in the black mud mixed with piss you sat like an armchair.

Tommaso sat there in the sun, half apennicated, feeling as good as he had ever felt in his life: even the desire to cry, which was tickling him in the back of his throat, he didn't lose at that moment.

Inside, Tommaso's mother was there, cleaning up the house: you could tell she was all cheerful, and talking to who knows who.

Tito and Toto came to play between Tommaso's feet.

They were wearing their usual rags: Tito was buried up to his ass inside a little overcoat perforated like a sieve. The other had flannel pajama shorts from the ECA package, and over a very dirty sweater, also American, with two rugby players on the back. All those rags, who knows why, seemed to be made of silk, and the tears, the stains, the stains were like embroidery.

Tito put his head in the mud, getting all smeared, stood up with his little legs in the air, and patapunfete fell on the other side with his belly in the air, and stood there on the mud for a little while laughing with his mouth wide, completely satisfied.

Toto, on the other hand, was a dog: he ran on all fours all around the courtyard, under the small moldy shed, between the sticky mud posts, against the walls of the shack: and he barked like a real little dog.

Every now and then the two little brothers met, by chance, butting heads, and then they looked at each other and hugged. They remained there tightly, hugging each other, as if they were obeying someone who was telling them: "Come on, give each other a kiss!" and continued to kiss even when the one who had given them the order had forgotten about them. Thus embraced, and every now and then giving each other a few kisses, they looked around, laughing like two little monkeys.

Suddenly, Tommaso's father came out from one of the streets between the shacks: he was all pompous, with a black suit, a black hat, a nice tie and gloves, one on and the other clutched in his hand.

He smoked, and walked like when you have new shoes that hurt your feet a little.

«To Tomà, have you had breakfast?» she asked Tommaso as she entered.

Tommaso looked at him in amazement, because it was the first time in his life that his father had asked him that question.

"Yes," he said, gloating all over, and pretending to stretch to hide his happiness.

Meanwhile, all the neighbors had come around the courtyard: and they stood there huddled together, in silence, laughing softly among themselves, and looking towards Tommaso's shack.

"Oh, what do these guys want?" thought Tommaso, squinting at them. He got up and went into the house. His mother was sitting on a straw chair next to the table. She was all cleaned up, too, in the white dress. But seeing her, Tommaso was suddenly struck by her fear, who knows why, he looked at her almost trembling and asked her: "What, are you dead, ma?"

Sister Maria started laughing: she got up from her chair and went to the cupboard. She opened it herself, and she began to remove a pile of food that never ended.

«Magna, to Tomà!» she told him, all kind and loving. And she put fettuccine, eggs, chicken, salad, perch on the table.

«Thanks, ma», said Tommaso, and began to eat, while his parents looked on, smiling.

The house seemed to have enlarged, and Tommaso struggled to recognize it: the sandwich that divided it in two was high and high, and yet it didn't end: it seemed as if he couldn't reach the truss, and there remained a void up there that it wasn't clear what it was.

"What's up there?" Tommaso asked his mother, starting to eat fettuccine.

"What's wrong?" said the mother, "you're sleeping!"

At that moment, the neighbors, pushing each other joyfully, began to enter the house: they were all happy, and their eyes were laughing: "Long live the newlyweds!" someone started screaming. And after a while there was a lot of revelry. «Long live the newlyweds, long live the newlyweds!»

everyone shouted. «Call to Carletto, with the ghitarra!» one shouted. But Carletto was now there, with the guitar, playing and singing, his disheveled neck and his eyes lit.

The spouses were Tommaso's father and mother. They smiled a little emotionally at all those parties, and Mr Torquato had taken Sister Maria below the waist, in her beautiful white silk dress, small and cute, as if they were about to pose for a photograph.

Meanwhile, Tommaso continued to eat, staying a little aside, so as not to disturb the wedding party with his presence. He took care of eating: he had a plate of fettuccine as tall as a mountain in front of him, and he couldn't twist them around his fork: when he did manage to do so, it was a fairy tale to be able to swallow them.

But they were as good as Tommaso had ever tasted them: there were two fingers of pecorino on top, and the fettuccine was clearly made with eggs: beautiful yellow, and smooth, tender but al dente, which fell to pieces in the mouth. , chewing them. They were greased with a nice color of tomato mixed with butter: and there were also three or four still healthy flakes of butter, here and there on the plate. And there were pieces of chicken scraps, mixed with pieces of mushrooms and pecorino cheese, which made your stomach water just by looking at them.

But Tommaso, as much as he liked them, had difficulty swallowing: there was a vice in his throat, which made him almost unable to breathe. He did nothing but look towards the sandwich, eager to get up and go and see that he was over there.

His mother, while the others all around were laughing, shouting, dancing, making such a racket that we couldn't understand anything anymore, came close to him, bent over him and said in his ear: «To Tomà, don't look at the sandwich !»

"It's fine, ma'," said Tommaso, sketching politely.

«I don't like fettuccine anymore!» he then said to her, a little embarrassed.

«And let it go», said Sister Maria, «now I'm a magnet for the chicken».

Everyone was happy: and Tommaso was getting a little annoyed, even though he didn't want to show it. He took a chicken leg in his hand and began to eat: and in the meantime he was thinking about what he had to do to be able to get up and go over there, beyond the sandwich. The chicken was also a godsend, as was the fettuccine, but Tommaso couldn't stomach it.

«Fuck...» he thought suddenly, «why? I'm not at my house? Aren't I going to sleep there?"

«To ma», he then said, «the inzalata and the perziche me 'and magno later, eh?» Having said this, he got up, passed behind Carletto who continued to sing, and found himself beyond the sandwich.

The room that was behind there was, like the whole house, much larger: the sandwich pointed up high, and was lost in nothing, and the brickwork was beautifully shiny, healthy. At the end there was the bunk where Tommaso slept, against the wooden and tarred paper wall. Tommaso approached us, enjoying himself very well, right from the start, that someone was lying in the bunk. He was so trembling that he could almost no longer walk or stand upright.

In any case, he approached the cot anyway, tremblingly took the sheet and moved it aside. There was Lello, lying there, still, with his mouth open, and all dirty, from his hair to his feet, with black blood. Immediately he sat down on the mattress. He was sitting there, looking straight at Tommaso, with his mouth open: he was looking at him as if it were the first time, full of surprise and fear. He seemed to want to tell him something, and his voice couldn't escape his throat. He was sitting slightly bent forward: and he was holding out, suspended in mid-air, his right hand, which was completely mangled, reduced to a pile of small bones and shreds of flesh, from which blood was dripping, staining the hem of the sleeve, the trousers. He kept his legs long and still: one of his feet was also completely crushed, and nothing could be seen except the leather of the shoe mixed with a bloody pulp.

Lello looked now at his hand and foot, now at Tommaso; but when he finally managed to say something, he looked only Tommaso straight in the eyes, shouting: "Give it to Tomà, they'll come after you!"

"And why?" Tommaso asked, trembling.

«Datte, Tomà, go away!» Lello kept shouting, scared and almost recommending himself.

The bed, the wall of rotten boards, the corner of the shack, everything had disappeared around it, and Lello was sitting on the cobblestones of Via Principe di Piemonte, with the tram stopped in front of the arch of Santa Bibiana. With his mangled hand in mid-air, still, he continued in terror to urge Tommaso to run away: but now, his voice was covered by a very loud scream, which drowned out all the walls, the streets, the squares around: it was the siren of the panther, which continued to circle up and down, nearby,

fading or louder, but always getting closer. Tommaso's mother was there too, and she hugged him, holding onto him tightly, and she too kissed him, leaving a little saliva on his cheek. By now the police siren was just a stone's throw away, there behind the corner of the road, it was about to arrive.

«Let me go, let me go, let me go», Tommaso shouted. «Oh my God, help!»

So he woke up, and immediately sat up in bed. She looked around, not recognizing anything, not the walls, not the windows, not the rows of beds. A dark-haired young man next to him was watching him, with his cheek resting on his hand.

"I can help you..." he said, a little cheerfully, as if to do something pleasant for him. «And you've been screaming for half an hour!»

"When am I?" Tommasino asked, almost without realizing it, yet understanding that it was a useless question.

The other one made a face full of almost cheerful amazement: «Ar Forlanini!» he replied. "Where are you? And she stood there looking at him impressed, with her eyes laughing at him.

Tommaso fell asleep a little, recovering: he straightened out the sheets which were all twisted, wet with sweat.

«Aòh, what, did something melt in you?» the brunette asked, a little jokingly, resuming the conversation.

Tommaso, although stunned, understood that it was from the law: "Yes", he said, "my soul has melted away!"

"Are you coming?" she asked then, turning over the pillow.

«From Hadrian's Villa, and you?»

«Stone-stoned».

He was silent for a while, concentrated, still shaking all over his body. "Have you been here long?" he asked the neighbor.

"It's six months and odd days," said the other, mischievously.

"Six months?" Tommaso almost shouted, widening his eyes. «But they give me something to do... I jump over the net and leave!» He struck with his right hand like a knife, forcefully, against the palm of his left, three or four times. «In here», he continued, with disgust, «they'll take care of whoever... they think so, but they can't handle Puzzilli in here!»

«I would be the only one!» said the other, calm and a little ironic. «Because in here they're fighting over what's left! They throw them out

from the door and come back in from the window!"

«If you see what kind of holes they've never made money!» said Thomas.

«When the holes arise, what do you do?» the boy continued, all expansively. «What do you think they're going to give it to you for a bowl of soup? Don't you know that we're sick? Everyone discards us! At least here it's raining or windy, don't worry! Do you know how much fate passes to you? Three hundred lire! Go away..."

Tommaso shrugged his shoulders, sneering: «What do I care», he said, «I don't want this handout! When I get back I'd rather become a thief!"

The brunette, however, didn't pay any attention to him: there was another thought running through his head.

«But now they can hear us! This shit we're doing must give us our rights! Here they do whoever gets more, the assistance doesn't bother us for anything: they've started to get fed up! And then when we leave here they have to give us what we deserve, eh! And then immediately, immediately, as soon as the illness is over, they have the opportunity to work!"

Tommaso listened, silently, and, following him, thought to himself: «What, has this guy gone mad? But what's next for me?"

«Our misfortune», continued the dark-haired boy, now excited, «was that the one who kept the whole shack up in here died! Just the day before yesterday, he died... under the operation... He made a friend by his bedside, so that the priest wouldn't come and betray him to confess... »

«Kill how much you talk...» thought Tommaso.

«He was our age, about twenty years old... That was a real man... When he stood still he stayed still, but when he moved he broke through... Now I'll show you a photograph...»

No sooner said than done, he took one of those sheets of shiny paper from the bedside table, with the photograph and the announcement of the death: and held it up to Tommaso. To please him, Tommaso took it and looked at it, turning it between his fingers. «Bernardini, if he called...» explained the brunette, more and more attached.

Tommaso took a look at the photograph of the dead man: he was someone with a long and determined face, with glasses, he looked a little like the Pope. The other continued: «I wish I had seen him one day when he brought back two trucks of stuff, because the stuff wasn't top quality, as we

should be! Aòh, there were no Christs or Madonnas, you know, turn around and go!»

"Is it! You have to see!" thought Tommaso. And loud: "What's your name, die?"

«Lorenzo», said the boy.

«Eeeeh», said Tommaso, yawning, «lucky you...»

Having said his name, with the same enthusiasm with which he had started chatting, and had given all those explanations, now this Lorenzo remained silent. Maybe he fell asleep again, all at once, like kids do.

Tommaso, on the other hand, continued to stay awake, not feeling sleepy and hoping that he would start chatting again. After a while, too, he called him: "A moro, a moro!" But he didn't answer, he had just gone back to sleep. He could see the dark patch of her hair and his face, still, against the pillow.

Tommaso continued to feel ill. He would have given a year of his life, if he still had one, to have a cigarette.

He lay there for a good while, perhaps for more than an hour, still on the bed, awake, drenched in sweat.

Then something changed: you could feel that it was no longer dark and dark outside, that a little bit of light was whitening the air. Or it was an impression: perhaps it was just the Permolio that was getting lighter, with its flame flickering in the middle of the sky. Not a sound, not a voice could be heard.

But then, little by little, some bells began to ring. They arrived feebly, muffled, as if they were coming from far away, beyond the pavilions and gardens, perhaps on Portuense, from the church next to Vigna Pia, or from some new church built in those parts, at Casaletto, at Corviale, at Santa Passera... It was a sound which Tommaso had never heard: or perhaps he had heard it as a boy and didn't remember it. It seemed to come up from the bottom of the earth, or from some point in the sky, above the early morning clouds, where there is a little light that is barely colored, and already seems like that of a beautiful and happy day. It was the sound of Matins. It still wasn't clear whether it was a sign of celebration, for the day that was returning, or whether it announced mourning, a misfortune. Maybe they were both things mixed together, and when they mixed they canceled each other out, and that sound was just one sound, which repeated itself, weak but continuous. Tommaso couldn't understand what he meant, because he

had neither the way nor the words to understand it, he had never paid attention to these things, nor had anyone ever spoken to him about them, as if they weren't even there. But now there was, and loudly, that sound, don don don, which passed through all those still sleeping neighborhoods, that old air, which, just barely, was beginning to lighten up, from within, as if from itself, becoming gray and clean, finding itself with all the things in between, walls, plants, buildings, streets. And for someone it had to ring: for the priest, who had it done, for the sacristan, for some old lady, for the workers who went to a night job, and at that time they turned off, for those who had to take the train and leave .

But, how to say, it seemed that those bells, that mysterious don don don don that announced everyday life, was instead saying no, that everything was useless, that everyone was alive but already dead, buried, lost souls. And at the same time the smell of mud, of rain, of caffè latte which, as if carried by the tolling of those bells, was beginning to be felt all around, gave a sense of calm and freshness.

As if stunned by that sound, which never stopped, now that it had begun, and indeed, other bells from other churches, from Trastevere, from Testaccio, from San Paolo, had also begun, with the same sound, the same melancholy, Tommaso gradually felt himself being taken over by a sleep that gripped him, irresistible and deep: he remained there like a stone, slowly falling asleep, while within himself he still resented the blows of those bells, telling him the dead . He dozed off, and slept for a good while, the sleep that had fallen upon him, full of peace.

He woke up thinking he heard another bell. And sure enough, as soon as he was fully awake, he realized that another bell was really ringing. But this one was closer: it seemed almost above his head, perhaps to a pavilion nearby, to the little hospital church.

It was already light: a light that hurt the eyes, white, was coming in from the window: and even whiter you could see the beds, on the brick floor, with all the shapes of those who were sleeping. Someone, already awake, was sitting on the bed, or standing next to the bedside table, in the light as clear as milk.

There was only one bell, it rang quickly and loudly; three shots one way: dan dan dan, and three shots another: den den den. Then he was silent for a while, then he resumed the three alternating blows. And so on, always the same. He played dead: Tommaso understood this sound well, he

recognized it. The chime seemed even louder, given that there was still enough silence, despite the fact that he felt good that life was now going on. And he almost got in the way, coming in from all sides, from the window, from the corridor, with his high-pitched, strident sound.

He wouldn't stop: all right, he was warning that someone had died, he had stretched his legs, poor guy, and goodnight Jesus Christ: but he was so insistent that it got in his head. Every time he stopped it seemed that he had stopped definitively, that the bell had been swallowed up by the silence of the morning, resigned, docile. Instead then here is the first dan again, and the first row of dans; and then the dens.

The sky was now dazzling but gray: perhaps because it was not daylight, or perhaps because it was covered in clouds. The only life in all that newborn light was that little bell, which rang, rang, was silent as if to catch a little breath, and then started to ring and ring again.

It was time to get up: what did Tommaso know, what he had to do. He just lay there in bed, still looking askew. The four tuberculosis patients who were with him got up slowly, except one, who was serious. The young man in the bed next to Tommaso was no longer there: who knows where he had gone, it was all about him. Those others did in silence what they had to do: with their white shirts up to their heels they went to the sink, one by one they washed their faces, like so many Zalamorte, then they dried themselves, and rested themselves on top of their shirts or underpants. white, some a jacket, some a sweater, or a shawl.

They said nothing to Tommaso, exchanging a few words between themselves, resigned. Tommaso lulled them with vomit. «'These scamorze!'" he thought. «But what, do they have the courage to even be happy? But what, do they have the goods in the sun, the trouble of these becoming priests?"

Then there was a big bang and he got up too. He threw the rags away, and in his shirt as he was, with his feet on the ground, he went to the sink, and washed himself, drying himself with a clean cloth, which was certainly his. Then he combed his hair, and put a nice little piece on it, as usual with him. He saw that he too had a long beard, like those other pipers. «But what, do I have something bad like that from them? Mwell! Now they see me!" he said acidly. He went to the locker, and took the machine his brother had given him to take to the hospital. He shaved in no time at all, because he had two stubble between his pedicels.

Then he got dressed, he didn't stay like that. «What, do they wear a good dress when they bake it?» she thought, her mouth twisted in contempt.

He went to the cupboard again, and took the best suit he had, the best so to speak, which he had had for two years, and also bought under the hood, at Porta Portese: he dressed up as best he could, with the tie and clean shirt. Finally he was ready. «What the fuck, damn it!» he thought.

He took it and went out, beyond the metal door, without locks or keys: he stuck his nose in the corridor, looked around, frowning. There was someone coming and going quickly, dragging all those disorganized clothes behind them. "I don't know," Tommaso said with a poisonous grimace. He took a few steps, where he heard noises, voices. He walked along the corridor for a bit, peering around: then he saw, at the end, a short girl, dressed in white, who was walking holding, against her belly, a tray larger than her, full of cups and saucers. «Now it's great!» thought Tommaso, "thank goodness!"

With his snout even longer he went to where the tarpana had come from, careful not to compromise himself too much in case he made a mistake, and in fact he saw that the corridor widened there, into a sort of room, all full of tables. The sick were sitting around, in silence, having breakfast.

Two tables were full of young people, more or less Tommaso's age. Tommaso looked around a bit, red with orgasm, because he didn't know what to do, whether he should stay there or whether the place for him was somewhere else. Then he thought: «Fuck...! I'll sit here, is that okay?"

There was a place, in lace at one of the young people's tables, and he sat down, waiting. Nobody gave him any strings. Tommaso, pretending to think about what he was doing, listened to their conversation. They were all talking about that Bernardini who had died two days earlier, and who was now being transported. «But what if everyone is obsessed with that, here? And who was he? Gioacchino Belli?" he thought: and meanwhile he kept his ears pricked up.

One said that now that he was no longer there, everything was over, Frascati was closed, and they could forget about doing everything they had in mind. Another said that if he lived like that he could have become a deputy or minister. «Hey!» thought Tommaso, «you have to see! Even more! »

The short girl brought him coffee with milk, with some bread and butter and a tray of honey: at that sight Tommaso forgot about Bernardini and everyone else, and began to eat with all his might. The others also finished playing in silence, quickly. Then, as if they were in agreement, they all got up and left together: and even some elders followed them. «Come on... they're going», he thought, «to hell with them! What, don't they know that they've already taken Rome?»

But in the meantime he too was eating as he ran away, to follow him. He swallowed the last bit of bread with honey, wiped his mouth with his sleeve and off he went, along those corridors, those staircases, without understanding anything, until he entered the door and left.

Outside, there was the garden, with Via Portuense at the end, the popular houses with laundry hanging on the balconies.

There were all evergreen bushes, pines, cypresses, oaks: in the streets and paths, between the Bursar's Office and the Reception Office, between the large arm of the Men's Department and the Orthopedic Department, almost no one could be seen at that hour. It was early, everyone was at breakfast. Only some old gardener passed by, as small as a peppercorn, with the yellow face of a sick old man, under his blue skullcap, and he swept the avenues and streets with a two-metre long broom.

What sun, what light, there were! They grew from minute to minute, visibly: the green was always greener, the light blue more and more heavenly. Not a cloud overhead, not even looking for it with a telescope. The air was as tense as the skin of a drum: you could hear the smallest voices from the surrounding neighborhoods, even though they were far away, and all the noises, the buzzes of the day that was beginning. It was all too clear and beautiful, under that brazen sun it was so bright. And a smell of warm earth, of dry and clean grass, of sea wind. It was truly one of the most beautiful days of the year when we went to Ostia: and everyone felt an itch in their hearts, a desire just to go and have fun.

Tommaso wandered around the garden a bit at random, trying to figure out the route the others had taken: the garden wasn't that big, but for those who weren't familiar with it, it was quite difficult to find their way around. Luckily he saw another small group of patients, almost all of them young too; he looked at them, walked past them for a few moments, letting them pass, then, pretending nothing had happened, slowly, with a grimace of boredom, he followed them.

Following him, he pedaled for a while along a secondary driveway, slightly downhill, which went obliquely, that is, neither towards the main entrance on Viale Ramazzini, nor towards Portuense. There the garden was a little wilder, with smaller trees mixed with the large old pines, with here and there half-buried pots of prickly pears. And here, beyond a slope, a small road, beyond a wall, which certainly went from Portuense to Monteverde: the garden path was parallel to this, and there at the end, in a clearing in front of a door, a barricade of people.

Tommaso approached us step by step, trying to keep his bearings: he had immediately realized that it was the transport of that Bernardini that everyone was talking about. The sick people, his companions, were crowded together, some in the small space next to the door, under a small building that looked like a cake, perhaps the caretaker's house; others had placed themselves under another building next door, oval in shape, with smooth walls and large colored windows: they went in and out. It had to be the funeral home. In fact, shortly after the door was opened: outside, on the street, there was the hearse with the priest, and they went to get the coffin inside that oval building. They carried her on the cart, followed by all the sick, who were crying: and the funeral began. There were many cars with roofs covered by crowns: and the flowers shone clear, burning, like coral, under the beautiful, increasingly stronger sun that reigned in all that peace.

Tommaso was left alone, with some more seriously ill patients, who couldn't go to the funeral, and who went off on their own business, up towards the hospital.

Tommaso also took it and turned around, walking back along the road he had taken. Now he was alone, and he had nothing left to do. He was desperate because he didn't have a cigarette, and he exhausted himself by smoking. «Damn him», he gritted between his teeth, almost crying, «but I'm doing something crazy, I'm not giving up like this! »

Everything around was empty, deserted under the blazing sun. At the top of the driveway was a six-foot pile of cabbage cores, still green and fresh, starting to rot in the heat.

A little further on, in another small space that he hadn't noticed before, there was a small house with a kind of bridge in front of it: it looked like a small workshop, a small furnace. Above there was a funny cone-shaped chimney, wide at the top: from this a thin and peaceful thread of smoke came out. Two little guys, two toilet brushes, with the smock that only

walked so much they were dry, with those little crooked legs, those big heads full of bumps, were pushing a trolley with a sack inside. Arriving in front of the furnace, they took the sack, and all tied up, with their souls outside, but willingly and slowly without haste, they rolled it inside, where the oven was: and they disappeared without saying a word, all hunched over, with those little birds' backs.

Tommaso turned his back on him and went up the garden, arriving under the side of his unit. «And now what do you do?» he thought back to himself. “Then am I going to butt horns?”

With a grip on his throat, almost crying, he didn't even know why, he went up the two flights of stairs, into that large entrance that looked like a ministry, and re-entered the corridor, where, after a few steps, there was the door to the his comrade. He had no other vision, no other hope than to stay there, throw himself back on the bed. Meanwhile he was starting to get so hot that you would sweat even doing nothing, standing still. He came in, and threw himself on the bed. Lorenzo, the dark-haired boy he had spoken to during the night, was also in the dormitory. "What are you doing?" he did this to him, "it's not time for me to lie down!" «What do I care!» Tommaso said, slightly raising one shoulder: he didn't know it was this deckchair, and he didn't care. He didn't even ask.

«Aòh», he said instead, after a while, in a hoarse voice, «where was this Bernardini in his room?» Bernardini spoke with skepticism, and a bit of anger, because he didn't like it when they carried him so much.

«Here we are upstairs!» said Lorenzo, raising his head from the newspaper he was so busy reading.

Tommaso lay on the bed for a little longer, then got up: reopened the door and entered the corridor.

He spat a little on the ground, out of embarrassment, out of indecision, then looked around a little scared, thinking that it shouldn't be done: there was no one there, and he shrugged his shoulders, repeating loudly, disgustedly: « What do I care! »

He oriented himself for a moment, and went towards the bottom of the stairs: he went up a flight, and was upstairs, in another identical corridor.

He looked around again, stretching his napkin: there were some sick people, going back and forth, entering the dormitories, but Tommaso was ashamed to ask, because it was stupid, something he did like that, just to pass the time.

Outside the windows, from up there, you could see streets and houses, along the Portuense, almost as far as the Tiber, which flowed in a green depression, between piles of construction sites, hovels, green meadows that evaporated in the too much morning light.

In the corridor, a little further on, there was a glass door, with frosted gray glass: it shouldn't have been a dormitory, nor even a refectory. In fact, printed on the glass in clear white letters, there were acronyms, ULT and others, inside small circles. Tommaso put his hand on the handle and opened it: he nodded: there was no one there. Just a large office, with three desks, and posters on the walls, behind the desks. Still with his hand on the handle, Tommaso peered around a bit: leaning on the windowsill of a large window there was an old sick man.

«Come on,» Tommaso asked him, «what, isn't anyone here?»

"Everyone's gone to the funeral," he said, turning his long, yellow face sideways.

Tommaso shrugged his shoulders and entered, thinking: «And who is going to help me come in? I come in the same!»

Inside there was only the sun, festive, absorbing everything, flickering on everything. There were flowers there too: on one of the desks, the last one, next to the window, the smallest.

Some carnations: some red carnations in a vase, and, behind, the photograph of that guy, that Bernardini. Tommaso recognized it at first glance, and, overcome by curiosity, began to look at what was on it. Nothing: some papers, typed, inside a folder dried up by the sun. There were books in the drawers, all full: old books, a little worn and dirty. Tommaso tried to read, a little here, a little there. We couldn't figure out anything: they were books that talked about politics, social facts, with difficult words that we couldn't understand. He opened a last drawer at the bottom, and, all dusty, curled up, battered, with the hammer and sickle, there was a new red flag.

Tommaso took it out by a tip and looked at it. At that moment, with all his might, he started ringing the bell again, the hospital bell, loudly and continuously.

Tommaso approached the window. Down there, in that sea of light, he recognized the slightly wild piece of garden, the small furnace where they burned the infected filth of the hospital, the buildings of the secondary

entrance, the street that ran alongside the Forlanini, where, shortly before , he had seen the transport of that boy.

«What if I die too?» she thought. «What if I had to do it here too?»

With all that heat and sweating, Tommaso felt himself trembling, as if frozen, as if, all of a sudden, night had returned around him.

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A few weeks passed, a month, two, and Tommaso began to learn the ropes of Forlanini's life. But around July, some events happened that shook everything up again, and for a while, Thomas had to pay tithes.

It is true that for some time now, the noses of those hospitalized, including Tommaso, had been smelling. At the headquarters of the Union of Tuberculosis Workers they were arguing about it, because Bernardini wasn't the only smart guy there, and there were others, like him, or almost like him, who worked hard, who fought, as they used to say . Tommaso didn't care much, but he had good ears and a nose. One day, while he was walking in the gardens around the Uninjured Department, he had seen a group of those, Boneschi, Triggiani, Taddei, Guglielmi and some others, with a camera, taking photographs inside a Mercedes: it was that of the deputy director of the sanatorium, a certainly Fani, a Jew who had joined Mussolini's party at the time of fascism, had been purged, and then returned again, stronger than before.

Tommaso stood his ground. One morning, finally, what was supposed to come, came: they had been expecting it at the Forlanini for a while. The nurses, the sanatorium workers, as they were called there, had made requests, which is regular: but the chatter had remained at zero. Until, in fact, one fine morning, they armed the strike, and out of eight hundred, only a hundred showed up.

As a replacement, two or three companies of rookies from the CRI, grenadiers, showed up, entering from the entrance on Via Portuense. They got out of the trucks, and were led into the kitchens. But they didn't give it away: so they caught and made them carry the stuff from the pantry to the various departments. The grenadiers worked very well, but the sick began to fret, to fret: they knew that with hygiene you had to be careful, that it didn't take much, especially when cleaning the dishes, the crockery, for the disease to attack: and especially those who were convalescents or who were simply pleuritic, it didn't bother them at all that people who didn't chew, who had no experience, came to work in place of the strikers. And then

there were only a few nurses who died, affected: and even for the soldiers, it was no joke. Everyone began to protest, to shout, to go out with accusations. No one, not even those who were worse off, remained in bed any longer: they had all gotten up, and were going back and forth through the corridors, piling up at the windows to keep the movement going.

Others, less serious, went in batteries around the gardens, between the departments, to see what the soldiers were up to. Meanwhile in the ULT headquarters, where there was also the Felice Salem communist cell, of which a certain Guglielmi was secretary after Bernardini, everyone was discussing what they should do. They decided to arm a commission and show up for a good swipe in the direction.

They went through all those corridors, those entrances and those stairways, and arrived at the management: they were received immediately and sweetened with all kind words. But as they went out, this time they went out from the front, towards the main entrance, because they felt a storm that never ended. There in the square, among the flowerbeds, many groups of sick people were gathered, looking outwards and shouting: in fact, behind the gates, there was a large police jeep.

Nobody liked that fact. And in fact there was already someone who had approached the railings, and he had started shouting at the policemen: «What are you doing? But what are you doing? But resign!" The ones shouting were some yellow guys, stripped alive, with hospital scrubs spanking them under their old clothes.

The Mau Mau had gotten out of the jeep, and were keeping them calm, on the open gate, under the raised barrier.

Those from the commission arrived, and, seeing them, the others raised their feathers even more: "Go away, you bastards, you renegades!" they shouted. "You know what you're doing with the sick, eh?"

There were around one hundred and fifty hospitalized patients. Someone had the idea of throwing the agents out of the garden, and slamming the gate in their faces: «Let's kick them out! Let's go down to these executioners, who don't have to get involved! The thieves would go to prison!»

The policemen, seeing the bad things, were about to pull one of them and take him with them. They took Guglielmi, who had come forward, to speak to the commissioner of Monteverde, and try to convince him to let his

men out of him: and it was he who instead shouted: "Take him, arrest him!" But the others intervened and sent him away with his clothes torn.

They didn't think twice about rebelling against the police, they didn't care, they were so sick, and some of them didn't even have any hope of ever leaving Forlanini again.

At that moment, however, another tiger arrived at full speed, which, as you can see, had remained hidden in some secondary street, or behind the curve of Viale Ramazzini. Other policemen got out, with truncheons. A mess happened. Some sick people attacked the policemen head on, starting to fight as best they could, poor guy who couldn't even stand up.

Others cut, frightened, down the avenues and alleys, under the trees, and the policemen followed, waving their truncheons, and making them run at full speed, like villains, back and forth.

At that moment the alarm siren of the sanatorium began to sound: it rang so many times, it was annoying. By now almost all the sick people who could walk had come under the direction, in the square of the main entrance: there were all fifteen hundred and two thousand. Those who were there, seeing the crowd advancing and massing in the square, mixed with it and began to come forward again. By now they had the idea of sending the police out of the hospital and closing the gates, and they had almost done it. But in the meantime, you can see that they were already keeping quiet, several other vans arrived, as well as four trucks, loaded with policemen, and two water cannons.

Five six hundred officers stood in front of the gate, with mallets in hand and water cannons pointed.

The sick had managed to bridle the gates and had gotten behind them. But it took the policemen about... to reopen them: they queued up two or three vans and loaded onto the gates, which they immediately broke free with their broken locks: and the policemen pushed them down at breakneck speed, without looking anyone in the face.

The inmates made a beeline, sneaking wherever they could, some towards the Invalids Department, some inside the management, dodging around all the laces, the corridors, the stairways. But there were many of them, and those who were most exposed, towards the entrance, in the garden, were unable to protect themselves from the charge: more than a hundred, the most vulnerable, who fought, yes, but then always reappeared, starting to shout again. even worse: «Attach yourself to the hoe, butchers!

Sold! A spit of blood in your face, we'll soak you!», they were completely foamed by the fire hydrants, and they got hot and ran into the departments, all dripping with white water, with their clothes stuck to the skeletons. They cried, they shouted.

By now there were still only a few people scampering around the gardens, with the policemen always hovering with their truncheons: the majority had all slipped in without distinction of departments, the women among the men, the men among the women. They staked all the doors. The police attempted to break them down and enter to occupy the interior. Then the sick people grabbed everything that came to hand that could be lifted and thrown away, and that wasn't their stuff: chairs, tables, boxes, nightstands, parrots. The policemen, singing as it was raining, retreated into the garden among the trees. But even there some little things arrived, thrown by the sick from the windows and verandas, where they used to lay on deckchairs. They were emptying and demolishing the whole hospital: and to some policeman, on the head, on the back, they shouted at him: «Here, becca, take care of a cocksucker, take him home! Aricontajelo to mom!»

Also so that everything inside the hospital didn't end up wasted in the garden, the policemen began to backtrack, towards the management, towards the main entrance: and the sick, once again, emerged from the wards, and they placed themselves at their shores as they retreated, continuing to haul the goods.

Little by little, fifteen hundred and two thousand all returned, all those who were in the square in front of the management, positioned along the gates of the entrance to Viale Ramazzini: they were satisfied, and, in the satisfaction, one could see better how much emotion, how much crying, how much venom they had. in the eyes.

They continued to attack the policemen from afar or took it out on the hospital management or the government.

Everyone had their say, and everyone was waving, waving, screaming, that they couldn't take it anymore: it was their nerves that supported them, with those unraveled clothes on their shoulders, those white bragolone pajamas, looking like a crowd of puffins.

Meanwhile, a group of people from the sanatoriums, for whom all that uproar had happened, went in the direction to speak to that famous Fani, and many others, saying that they would suspend the strike if Celere went

small and went back to doing his job. They told him no, that they couldn't, that the prefect, the police commissioner, now had control of the Forlanini. But then other events intervened, and in short, back and forth, they ended up reaching an agreement: the policemen played nice, cleared out the square, and the patients, increasingly satisfied, partly returned to their wards, to lie down on the beds, to rest. some, some remained there in heaps in front of the entrance.

Half an hour passed, an hour passed, it was midday; and then all of a sudden the police vehicles showed up again, they entered the hospital at full speed, and without even giving time for word to get through, they placed their trucks in strategic points, and occupied the inside of the departments .

Some people tried to resist, especially the women, who were the most poisoned, but the policemen, who, they said, were directly commanded by Police Commissioner Fusco, were determined to put an end to it.

The rumor immediately passed from mouth to mouth that there was nothing to be done, that they were good enough to kill: they said that a patient in surgery had pulled her by the hair, dragged her on the floor, and had torn her clothes. , who was left only with her petticoat in pieces. That another had become so frightened that she had become mute and she no longer spoke; and another with a pneumothorax had been bludgeoned away.

The fact is that all the departments were occupied by the police: there were from ten to thirty cops for each department. They stayed there all afternoon and all night, while the trucks patrolled the gardens, with their headlights raised.

They camped in there with tear gas bombs, machine guns and pistols.

Towards morning, with the lists already ready, they began to make out, to arrest those responsible: these were all already marked, the leaders of the ULT, of the united union, of the communist cell, it goes without saying, and so on: they they took them and made them come out with their hands raised above their heads, and took them away.

That room, which served as the headquarters for organizations and parties, was forced open by the police, who entered, tore up and seized everything.

Hundreds of people, relatives of the sick, had already piled up at the gates of the Forlanini, both on the Viale Ramazzini side and on the Via Portuense side: but they wouldn't let them in. Then, a little later, when the sun was already high, a truck came to the secondary entrance, and they

began to throw on it the sick people who they were sending away: some arrested, others discharged or transferred to other hospitals. There had to be at least two hundred. They caught them and took them away without weighing them, even if, when necessary, they vomited blood while they took them away.

Eating, they ate with the agents, a plate of cold pasta, which was worse than a pasta dish, and some canned stuff.

Meanwhile, they continued to hunt for those who had to pay and who had gotten into trouble.

Every place was good for hiding: the hospital had become a sea port, we couldn't understand anything: those who had to hide so as not to get drunk changed their places with friends from other departments, trying to hide their faces, with bandages, with black glasses: or they threw themselves into deckchairs, on the verandas, huddling under the covers.

Tommaso was eating his cold pasta, sitting on the bed, with a displeased face, silent, like an old slut. One bite after another, gorging with a bitter mouth, and a movement of the throat that seemed to say: "You suck." On the blanket, next to him, he kept a can of meat with pickles as a spare.

Even the other old hospitalized people were playing around, hunchbacked, each one turning his back on the other, like the workers, the elderly labourers, when they eat under the construction site, with their backs against some dusty fence. You could hear the thump thump of their mouths chewing, slowly and patiently.

Lorenzo ate standing, against the wall, busy taking a look every now and then through the glass of the door. In fact, there, in the lane, Guglielmi and another man, a certain Pezzo, had come to hide while they were running away with some agents behind them: there was Lorenzo there, who they knew, and they had taken the route.

Even the officers guarding that department were eating, a little further away, at the end of the corridor. They had placed the metal plate against the sill of a large window, and, leaning on one elbow, they too were chewing and swallowing, hungry, young as they were, with those dark country faces, and they were silent, you can tell. They too were overwhelmed by everything that happened.

«Er movement, er movement!» Lorenzo suddenly shouted in a low breath. Immediately, at the drop of a hat, Guglielmi and Pezzo threw themselves, one under Tommaso's bed, the other under Lorenzo's.

Tommaso stood still, looking like stone, motionless, fixed, as if he didn't see or hear anything: he was eating. He put it in his mouth, chewed it and swallowed it. All without changing his expression, disgusted and resigned, with a face that looked like D'Artagnan.

In fact, shortly afterwards the patrol passed, and also paid a visit inside Tommaso's ward: they saw nothing but people eating, behind Tommaso, in no particular order on the beds, and who all turned their faces with their mouths stuffed towards them. . There was also a supervisor: from the subtle face he made you could see that he had amused the movement of the dormitory: but he didn't give a damn about him. The officers instead looked, asked the names of those present, and left immediately: they had done their duty: if there was anyone under the beds, blessed souls and they were fine with it.

The tarpana came, with the zinnoni, took and took away the dirty dishes, baccaiating all over her head, as God wanted.

An hour passed, two. The policemen up and down the corridor, and the news that arrived, more and more desperate: everything was over at the Forlanini. The strike had been an excuse to suffocate everything, chase away the undesirables, bring everything back to order and resignation.

There were comrades, elderly and uncompromised, who went up and down, bringing the news. One came and said that the police were about to return, with the lists ready: and this time they were seriously looking. «'Namo», he said, «I'll take you to a good price! »

"Where?" Guglielmi asked.

«Come with me!» Philo the elder said.

«We also need to take us to the cave», he added, «so that he can see where this place is, so that after a while he'll take you to the restaurant and stay in contact with you! Oh, I'm already half-tined, they're already looking at me ugly!"

Lorenzo was well known, he had been hanging out with the bosses for a long time, he was busy. The others were already half-corpse neni, ready to be informed.

«Viecce te, a morè!» the old man said to Tommaso.

Tommaso's heart sank, as if he had been punched, he twisted his mouth into such a serious and disgusted grimace that he looked like he was about to spit poison and, blushing, his face became as dark as a firebrand. He nudged the door with his head, and in a muffled voice said, "'Let's go!"

They went out into the corridor, frankly, as if they were going to the toilet, or to get some fresh air, walking step by step. The two policemen at the end of the corridor looked and said nothing, good good people, as if they had no eyes or ears.

Tommaso tried to get the route they were taking clearly into his mind: they went down, went out into the garden, passed the whole horseshoe-shaped courtyard between the Men's Department and the Women's Department, and entered this through a small secondary door. They had done it. They disappeared inside, as if nothing had happened, straight as if they had swallowed the nails. There was a small corridor, which led, a little further on, to the Supervisors' Office: but immediately there, there was a small door, which opened onto a basement.

Guglielmi was a tall guy, with a thick back, a little stiff, and with the face of a boy who was always thoughtful: it was clear that he was ill, his skin was grey, without a bit of blood, and his lips were the same colour, small and large. His companion, on the other hand, was blond, with light eyes and a long face, who spoke with the Veronese accent. They went in, as if they had been doing things like this all their lives, and the old man locked them inside, and took the key away.

As he and Tommaso returned to the dormitory, the old man greeted him and said: «Now you have to think about those two: I have other things to do, and now they're looking for me too, you know. Now, there you go, locked up. Remember to bring them to eat, you know, it won't make them die of hunger! I salute you, in more', and I command you, do things in style!» He grabbed it and left.

Tommaso remained with the sword in his hand: with a half yawn, he put it in his pocket, thinking to himself, but not so angry, that he almost laughed:

«But fuck...! You'll understand, I screwed up!"

It was four five in the afternoon. The evening came, those beautiful evenings of midsummer, when the darkness never falls, and, if the moon rises, it is up there, close and warm too, useless because its light is of no use, but beautiful all the same.

At Forlanini the arrests, the fistfights, the beatings and the crying continued. Being kicked out of there, for a sick person, for a convalescent meant a lot: not to mention those who had to end up at the sucker, like thieves.

Tommaso had agreed with the joker, speaking everything in signs and allusions, because they were all idiots there, in his opinion, and even the walls aroused the ears.

At dinner time, the little girl brought two extra portions to Tommaso's dormitory: he was eating, and as he was playing he showed everyone that he was eating. She was all swollen, for what she was doing, she almost winked at the guards too. Tommaso, helped by Lorenzo, made two parcels, tightly packed, put them under his jacket and set off.

He walked back after lunch, through the garden, to the cellar, and opened the door. The two buddies were still in there, like two old convicts.

They immediately asked Tommaso for a lot of information, how things were going, whether the arrests continued, whether above or below. Tommaso, really, so much f... he didn't know. He responded to him as he responds to kids, to make them feel good, by agreeing with him. He left him the food and went away, looking carefully around the bell, because nearby was the supervisors' room.

He went to sleep. The next morning, the same story. The badass came with some extra stuff to eat. Only, however, just before noon, the patrol had passed once again, six or seven policemen with a plainclothes commissioner, and this time, entering the dormitory, he had asked everyone for their documents, and they had also looked closely at everyone present, asking: «Do you know a certain Aldo Guglielmi, here?» Everyone stretched out their mouths, twisting their mouths with their lips out, and with a sour expression in their eyes, which all of them almost spat out due to the bad taste they felt inside their mouths. «And who knows him? And who is he? And who saw it?» they did. The inspector left, after glaring at them, with a blue eye that didn't bode well, accustomed as he was to looking at everyone like thieves, like harmful insects. He went away, with his little pigeon's back and shaved scruff, and that face like a prankster: "Get away!" Tommaso said from behind, with a piece of his mouth almost falling off, he was so crooked and drawn from disgust.

Then, after half an hour, when the waters were a bit calm, he took the two parcels and ventured out again.

The two companions were in really bad shape, as white as two souls. The basement had only one small, long window at the top: and there were only two benches and a table, with showers behind them: it was a changing

room, which was not used at that time. There was nothing else inside, and those two unfortunates had had to sleep on the floor.

They couldn't take it anymore. But they weren't disheartened at all: they asked for news about the others, about the situation, about the newspapers: as if they had nothing to worry about for them. They began to eat quickly, without even looking at what was inside. While eating they didn't speak, and so Tommaso was able to say to Guglielmi: «Aòh, look what they're looking for you, you know!»

Guglielmi then wanted to know everything in detail. Then, having finished eating, calmly, he got up and said, with that little fleshy little mouth: "Near here is the headquarters of the Internal Commission Office... Wait for me a moment, I'll go and come back."

He took it and went out, after a while he returned, even whiter, holding a typewriter. He put it on the table, leaned over it, and stayed there for a long time writing and rewriting. As soon as he finished, he turned towards Tommaso and said: «It's a proclamation: I invite the patients to remain calm, and I appeal to the police to try to avoid violence with the sick... You should try to put these fools in the noticeboards of the Internal Commission, both of the men's and women's departments... Can I tell you?»

"Of course?" said Thomas. «Dude», he then said to himself, «you still don't know who Puzzilli is!»

"Give it to me!" he said, taking the papers that Guglielmi gave him. «If we see!»

The two locked themselves inside, once again, and Tommaso went away with an indifferent air along the corridor and then through the garden. He put his hands in his pockets, and, as if he had left the house to go to the cinema or to the bar with friends, he began to whistle, happily thinking:

Maruzzella, Maruzzeeee...

A little whistling, a little mumbling the words of the song, he returned to the Men's Department, with his little eye that, while his mouth sang, looked this way and that, quickly, to see if there were any right or wrong people around. spies. The right ones were stationed, as usual, at the end of the corridor where Tommaso's room was: he passed in front of us, with his mouth open in a half yawn, his eyes cooked by the expression of boredom and well-being, under the wrinkled forehead.

Thus he also passed in front of the door of his room, with Lorenzo and the other Zalamorte who followed him thoughtfully: he went to the other staircase, and went upstairs. There were two more guards at the end of the corridor: but the party headquarters with the noticeboard in front of it was beyond a turning point. There were more dormitories there, and therefore there was more chaos.

«Aaaa», thought Tommaso, «what, did he go outside the river?»

Beyond the curve there were fewer people. Only a group of young men, next to a large window, taking in the air. Tommaso knew them, who were communists. «Now I'm making my heart ache!» he thought, all disheveled, red on fire.

One was Banana, another Cecio, another Gaggio: they were from Quarticciolo. One had been from the Gobbo gang as a kid; he was there when the Hunchback was dead, pierced with bullets like a sieve.

The disease had stripped them of their flesh, the edges protruded from under their eyes, almost tearing away the skin, and they had all become sluts, with holes in their jaws: so flayed, gnawed, with that gray skin, the long mops above the collar of their clothes the shabby and bedraggled clothes they wore looked even more like executioners.

However, as Tommaso was about to pass in front of them, the right ones emerged from the end of the corridor: still the usual rude inspector, with the little blue eye, paraded like a weasel, and behind him the other mau mau, all armed, who, despite obeying, they were playing catch-up.

“Who farted?” said Gaggio, looking half out the window. Banana, also sniffing disgustedly, clapped him on the shoulder: «Eh, some fracicons!» he shouted, pointing at the guards out of the corner of his eye. Everyone was peaceful, happy, laughing with swollen jaws, looking at each other, or out the window. «Eeeeeeh», Gaggio said again, clapping his hands loudly palm to palm, with elbows high, and then rubbing them good-naturedly, «eeeh, good game!»

“Be careful,” Cecio shouted suddenly, “it's only six months!”

And he began to laugh, peacefully, with his tongue between his lips, so that as he laughed he dripped saliva all over himself. Hilarity had now invaded everyone: an expression of happiness and general optimism had fallen into their eyes, and it was placed there with a light full of innocence and virtue. They continued to laugh, looking at each other, and as they laughed they pressed their necks against their necks, or shook their heads

no, as if to say: "We're strong, we're strong!" As the laughter tended to subside, there was always someone who said again: «Ah, how heavy the spade is!», and down again, with beautiful, innocent, cordial laughter, while the eyes stared at the air, just a little ' agri.

The right ones passed by: they stopped or they didn't stop, they stopped or they didn't stop, oh God, if they stop, we're there, no, no, they're leaving, thank goodness, and now what are they doing? do they spit back on us? Get away, damn you! And laugh, don't worry. Tommaso had mixed up with them, leaning one shoulder against the wall with his hands buried in his pockets, and he was laughing calmly.

As soon as the guards had passed and were far enough away, Tommaso made a plop with his mouth, calmly stopping to laugh patiently. Then he detached himself from the pile, and, under the vaguely curious eyes of his companions, he went step by step towards the notice board next to the sealed glass door.

He gave a quick scan around, zack here, zack there, opened the door, the pins were already there, in the old sheets, he put the new ones, closed the notice board, and left.

Meanwhile, the others, cautious, approached. Tommaso passed in front of him, and slurred, calmly, like the Scarlet Pimpernel: "Aaaaa, tell them all to come to the law!"

And he returned to his dormitory.

The day after the raid at Forlanini continued, and it was even worse because, since things had necessarily calmed down a bit, it was easier for the police to search. The sanatorium workers, without having achieved anything, had returned to work, and were monitored by the police. Now it had become more difficult for Tommaso to bring food supplies to his companions.

The sun was burning, nice and high, and it was time to turn: who knows how hungry those two fakirs were, locked in there. Tommaso, with the usual breakfast parcels, went towards the basement, to the Women's Department. He did everything he had to do, but, as he was in front of the little door, and bending down, he knocked, he turned to look around, and saw, ten meters away, an overseer, a certain Saletta, standing still and looking at him.

Tommaso came in and said: "An overseer saw us, he's a worse boy than the slut who's in here!" He poked his head out again, but the supervisor was

no longer there.

«And off I go to warn the police!» said Thomas. By now they dreamed of being able to stay there: they took it and cut in a hurry.

They ran up a staircase, then another smaller one, then down a corridor, they arrived at a corridor. There were three beds, with the women on top, acting as deckchairs. Guglielmi knew them, and he was known. They hid there. For two hours Guglielmi and one of the women, one from Milan or Genoa, who had been a partisan, talked about politics.

The time came for the doctor's visit: there was nothing to do but hide under the beds again: there were three of them, and for about ten minutes they remained huddled under there, until the doctor left. Meanwhile, another woman came to warn that the policemen who had already begun to go around the pavilion, immediately warned, as we see, by that Saletta, were approaching. They couldn't stay there either: now the policemen under the beds were watching us. «But I know, a place!» said the woman. They ran away. They ran along another corridor, another staircase, small, with short flights: they ran to the end, and there, under the staircase, the woman showed them a small, half-open, broken-down door: it was a low under-stairs door that was jammed with the head on the ceiling, and everything on. The woman left, and they remained there, inside that sort of segregation cell, still talking about politics.

It was already evening: there was a darkness that you couldn't see two centimeters from your nose in there. Smoking, they didn't have a cigarette, hunger was starting to make itself felt.

«Here you can't see the day coming!» thought Thomas. «It doesn't winter here!»

The Veronese, Pezzo, was a fake, and it was always Guglielmi who spoke, calm, calm, with that head that looked like a round cork in a square bowl, those little lips that moved quickly, under the fixed gaze of a boy.

And then they heard a knock, softly, on the door: slowly they opened it, and in the last light coming down from the stairwell, they saw a dark-haired young man, a stocky man. He wasn't a patient, he was wearing a black jacket over his dress. In fact he was a switchboard operator there at the hospital: and he knew this Guglielmi too. «They warned me 'and women», he did this. «Let's go!»

“Shall we go?” Tommaso said to himself, following the company, all strung up and excited, but calm.

The young man led them along a corridor: at the end of this there was a door, low, and to get to it you had to go down three or four steps. They entered it, and continued down a flight of stairs that never ended, dark. But the switchboard operator had a blind, and he was shining the light, walking forward.

Thus they arrived at an underground, and from this to another: under the entire Forlanini there were underground passages, so that underground, you could get from one end to the other. They walked for a good quarter, and finally went up another ladder. Made of lace, the door opened right into a sort of cave, all clean, however, like a small room. It looked out into the garden, under the side of the verandas of the Men's Department. They stretched their necks outside, in the open air, under a beautiful moon, shining in the middle of the sky, over the city. You could hear the voices, the laughter, the sounds of the buses for Portuense, all the buzz of summer evenings.

About fifty meters away, at an entrance to the department, there were two guards: they were quite far away, there were many bushes and small trees in the middle, but they could see them anyway. "I'll go," said the switchboard operator, "come on and have some fun!" He shook hands with his two companions, wished them well and left, lighting a cigarette. They saw him slowly approach the two officers and begin to speak to them, positioning himself so as to block the policemen's sight.

Tommaso and the other two, immediately, all hunched over, slipped through the bushes, the trunks of the trees: to reach the bottom of the garden it took absolutely nothing: two zompi among the flowerbeds, on the dry grass. They arrived at the fence that fenced off the garden, high, with a bit of lace barbed wire. Behind, here is the road, the Via Portuense, with many people coming and going, under the houses; there were old ones, red and peeling, and new ones, flaming white. In front of a mechanic, a group of boys were astride the motorcycles, with the engines running, discussing, arguing. Buses passed loaded with people; from the open windows, with the lights on, voices and songs came out, which were lost in the warm air, under the moonlight.

Tommaso started to climb over the fence, like the others: but Guglielmi stopped him and said: «What are you doing? What are you running away from? They don't know you, it's better for you to stay here, and get treatment as you should..." For the first time he smiled a little: "You don't

want to be crazy like me, no, I even went against myself by wanting to leave. he does too much, instead of staying with his belly in the sun and thinking about his health!

Of course, Tommaso really felt like making that leap and going off to roam freely, but he understood that Tommaso was right, and he immediately fell silent, helping the others to climb up the fence.

But before leaving, Guglielmi turned to Tommaso again, and looked him straight in the eyes, with that poor rubber face of his.

«Thank you, Puzzilli», he said to him, «you were great!» and she shook his hand.

He took it and climbed up the net; the Veronese was already there, waiting impatiently. Tommaso watched them as they ran across the road, arrived on the other side, near the mechanic, and headed towards the car stop: around them there was all the comings and goings of cars and people at dinner time . From certain old hovels a troop of kids came down towards the stop, going who knows where.

With dirty snouts under their tufts, they held each other in each other's arms, talking eagerly, without looking anyone in the face. Some were talking and talking, others were silent and laughing. And those faces, above the dirty colored, naughty collars, were the very image of happiness: they didn't look at anything, and went straight towards where they had to go, like a herd of goats, clever and without thoughts.

«Aaaah», sighed Tommaso, «I was rich, and I didn't know it!»

4. OLD SUN

The August sun highlighted dust and strips, rubbish and grass, reeds and rubble. Pietralata stretched out in front, against the mountains over the Aniene and the gray sky. The old barracks, on the right, and behind, the whole range of lots and rows of houses, like a kind of indigenous city, with such a strong smell of heated filth that it was heartwarming. Every now and then a gust of sea breeze would come, a little cooler, and then the smell of the mud and reeds of the river would mix with the stench of the little houses full of rags, bands and children's piss.

Actually, at that time, the village had changed a little. They had demolished seven or eight rows of evicted houses and streets in the center, and had built three or four new buildings, dark and large, like mountains, full of small windows, with many small courtyards, entrances and stairs, which blocked the sun from the other houses. which had remained around and around the lots as yellow as hunger.

The Lux cinema up the street had changed its name and was now called the Boston cinema. The little factory under Monte del Pecoraro had closed, and in its place, in the slums, there was a Zeppieri warehouse.

Tommaso, along the deserted road burned by the sun, pedaled cheerfully with his hands in his pockets, quite dissatisfied within himself with all those changes: he looked around, like an owner who returns to his post after a while, and since he knows the area inside out, he notices everything, he sees everything, both what has remained the same and what has changed. Nicely wearing a tie, he came forward slowly, without haste, but supported: however, with that calm, satisfied and almost bored air, underneath him, his heart was beating so hard that it made him dizzy.

And as he got closer to the car stop, that thud that could be heard in the middle of the coasts increased more and more. So much so that he even had a little tremor in his legs, and although he continued to sweat like a broken faucet, his cheeks had become a little white and his eyes were lost.

He yawned again, stretching himself like a crook, then took it and, without much fuss, took the central street of the village, towards the section, among the houses of the evicted.

Out front in the little brick courtyard the sun was blinding, and there was no one there. All silence. Tommaso sniffed at him, gave two or three more puffs on the stub that barely fit between his fingers, it was so small,

threw it away and went in. The sun also entered the two rooms of the house, making the dust burn, the red flag on a corner, the painting of Baffone. There was no one to be seen, not even there. «Aòh, of course!» Tommaso said in a hoarse voice, taking a few steps into the first room.

After a moment, in a bit of shade, he made out a man sleeping behind the rickety counter. It was Cazzimperio, the one who ran the section's tavern. He slept in a small straw seat, between the dining room and the counter, both dry, without a wine stain, due to the heat.

His gray head like a skull had fallen over the back and you could only see two teeth protruding from his black mouth, his moustache, and the crooked nose with boogers and hair. He snored softly. Tommaso thought: "Damn him!" and he went into the other room, the large one, where he was dancing: no one there too, but the office door was open. Tommaso approached us and nodded, repeating: "Permission?" Inside the office there was only one person, bent over the desk putting stamps on envelopes and with every blow, no matter how light, the desk was knocked upside down.

«Aòh, to Persichi!» Tommaso said, recognizing him, even though he was a little boy whom he only knew by sight. He raised his eyes at him, looked at him for a moment, and then immediately lowered them again, resuming his work.

«Aòh», said Tommaso, «say, what should I do?»

He was silent for a moment, very excited by what he was about to say, and trying to take the most indifferent and normal tone he could, he continued: «I was with Forlanini, no... and right there, now, I wanted to join the party too ... But with that mess we had, they advised me to wait until I got out... Now I came: what should I do?"

And the other one was silent and stuck the stamps: he stuck two or three more, while Tommaso waited, not knowing what to say anymore, a little confused, shaken with emotion. Then she looked up at him, and stretching her pale jaws around his slightly toothless mouth, she said: "There's no one here now."

Tommaso also stretched out his face and said: "And when... do I have to introduce myself?"

But the other one was already bent over his stamps again: this time too he stuck two or three of them, then raised his head again, as if he had to say something important, officially, and said: «Later. There's a meeting."

"Later, when?" Tommaso insisted.

«At 'e five, at 'e six», this Persichini said, looking at him in silence, with his mouth slightly open, seriously.

"Okay!" Tommaso said after a while, starting to leave. «I'll come back later», he added: but he didn't even listen to him, and ran his tongue over his stamps, grumpy and severe.

Outside, there was hell. Everything was grey, collapsed. The rows of houses appeared faded in the empty streets, among the vegetable gardens without a leaf, without a hint of green. As you walked, it stuck to your flesh like a rag soaked in hot water.

The streets wound into the village, all yellowish, against the mounds and rubbish dumps, with the small wooden church at the end.

From one of those streets a sort of native came forward, with torn rubber shoes, American trousers, a bare chest and a shirt in his hand. As he approached, walking under the sun, Tommaso saw that it was Zucabbo: he had become big and big-headed, and his hair, instead of being brown, as he had always had, was blond, and glistened in the sun.

"Oh, well, where did you come from?" asked Tommaso.

«Aòh, what did you do?» Tommaso said, instead of answering him, staring at his hair.

«I'm oxygenated!» said Zucabbo, grinning. «At Porta Portese», he added, «there was a blond man, a certain Roberto, der Mandrione, who had blond hair, but really blond, like gold, with a ringlet that reached all the way to the eyes. I liked them, aòh, and I oxygenated them too. But not just me, please! There must have been twenty-five of us in there, all oxygenated!"

«Okay!» said Thomas. "So are you going, now?"

"Let me have a bath," said Zucabbo.

Tommaso was a little hesitant to think. «Let him come to me too, go!» he concluded.

We went to the end of the last lots, crossed the Montesacro road, and entered the middle of the countryside.

Everything there was burnt, the grass yellow, and, green, there were only a few reeds along the river. The perch trees, the cherry trees, all black, crooked, with many branches, were as if it were winter: dry without a leaf. The grass all around was on fire, you could see the black spots of cynices among the gutted bushes.

There wasn't a soul in the entire charred expanse of fields, along the Messi d'Oro, except for a few kids, tattered like Zucabbo.

As they walked, the two friends talked about this and that: mostly about the mutual friendships they had, which Tommaso, having been away for more than a year, hadn't known anything about for a long time. Now almost no one lived in Little Shanghai anymore: in the shacks there were new people, almost all Buri, Tarpani who had come up from the dirtiest villages in Puglia and Calabria.

Lello continued to go to Rome to beg, and all the others more or less entered and left the Coeli.

Chatting and chatting, they reached the aqueduct bridge, went down the reeds and arrived on the little beach.

This was all full of naked, black kids, running in and out of the water, among the rocks, on the smelly sand. Zucabbo took off his trousers, and then his rubber shoes, with a choking stench.

«Er Shitter?» Tommaso continued to inquire, remembering it.

Zucabbo looked him in the eyes with an expression of happy surprise. "What, you don't know?" he asked. «Nou!» said Thomas.

«Didn't you hear anything from Shitter?» Zucabbo brought us back, already naked. «Then listen! listen!»

And taking off his pedals, with his butt on the dirty sand, he began to tell about Shitter.

Shitter's mother, the Old Woman, beat at Cerchi. It had been four or five years now: that was her area, and every evening, as it got dark, she was there ready, and stayed there until the last tram, which took her back to the barracks in Piazza San Giovanni di Dio, in Monteverde Nuovo: he lived there with the zaraffa, his pimp. There were five or six others just like her, old colleagues, the Spagnola, the Capitana, Marisa. They stood high up, towards the Archaeological Walk, on the ruined wall around the Circles, or in the middle of the large oval lawn, on the escarpment under the Piazzale Romolo e Remo, among the thickets, on the mud.

Sometimes dozens of customers arrived: there were the little lawns, one of which was half asphalted, where in the morning the children played football, which were actually tingling. You could see the white shirts, the sweaters, turning here and there, in the darkness, and the red dots of the cigarettes lighting up: if there was the moon, it was as if it were day. The boys, the young men, the soldiers, and even some drunken elderly people, were standing in the middle of the clearings, frolicking or waiting. The whores retreated against the shadow of the embankment under the square,

and there they dug holes in the earth against pieces of ruins. Slaughterhouses often happened: certain youngsters would come down in cliques, hungry, backwards, looking for trouble, and they wouldn't stay calm until they started arguing, over some stupid thing, like kids: and since the whores weren't into it, certain things happened. arguments that never ended. Then perhaps at the best moment the Capitana would come running, strapped in, shouting badly: "It's a movement!", or to be even more witty: "It's a social movement!", and then everyone would fight, on one side and on the other. the other, through the clear twilight, among the thickets, towards the slopes.

One winter evening, while Tommaso was at the Forlanini, four or five boys, no more, came down to the Cerchi of Via Portuense. They left the motorbikes up, beyond the wall, and went down to the center of the Circles, with their hands in their pockets, singing like blackcaps.

The day before it had snowed a little, and, inside the Cerchi, among crusts of mud hardened by the cold, zella and wedges, there were a few gray patches of snow left.

Encouraged by that Christmas atmosphere, as well as by the fact of the whores that could already be seen down there, among other groups of boys, the members began to sing even louder, running here and there, like drones. There was one who was almost completely shorn, with hair standing straight on the scruff of his neck, with a face like a patient from Monte Mario who was scary just to look at him; another was a dark-haired man from a northern family, who, since he was shy, was more mischievous than anyone else; and the rest were little redheads with creaks on their faces and skin white from the cold, perhaps brothers.

The madman, with a coat that almost reached his heels and a buttoned collar tightly around his neck, was called Er Buretta. This Buretta, all of a sudden, made an even more parable face than he already had. He said: «Water in the mouth, eh!»: He took some snow, crushed it well and put it in a pocket of his coat. With the others coming after him, without forgetting what he intended to do, he introduced himself handsomely to one of the sluts who was wandering around a bit alone, with her bag in her hand in the middle of the Circles.

He acted like a good boy with her, talked about the weather, the cold, asked her how much she let off steam and all these nice things: then with a fine boyish face, he asked her if she would please show it to him. He did so

much and prayed so much that her mother, to get him out of her way, took and pulled up her skirts up to the top of her skirt.

The other, who had his hands in his pockets, Ciàcchete, kicked out the snow that had melted a little and slapped it in his girth, black as the entrance to hell.

The slut started screaming like a scoundrel, out of cold and anger, while the others around her threw themselves on the ground and collapsed in laughter. Then, since they had taken a liking to it, they went around the Circles to repeat the joke with the others, including the Old Woman. When there was no more snow they left.

They returned five or six days later, put the motoms back in their usual place, and entered the meadow.

We can't even talk about snow anymore. It was nice and warm and now seemed like spring. So much so that Buretta didn't even have a coat, and had only come with a sweater and a shawl for beauty.

They came down singing and laughing. Suddenly like the other time, Buretta had a thought: he put on the fine face of when he made a decision that not even Christ could control him, and said: «Aòh, look for a piece of paper, but a nice hard one, the one to parcels, eh!»

The others, saying something stupid, started looking for this piece of paper. They found it immediately, because a piece of paper is never missing in Rome. It was really the yellow one for parcels. The Buretta took it well, as it was a little damaged, gave it a few blows to remove the dust, and placed it nice and wide on the ground. Having done this, he undid the buckle, pulled down his trousers, crouched down on the paper and calmly began to unhook. The others, holding their noses and shouting dirty, stinky, ran here and there, waiting. As soon as he had finished, Buretta made a nice package, and this time he didn't put it in his pocket, but kept it behind his back, pedaling hard on the hoof side.

The first one they met was the Old Woman. This her, with so many that she had gone through in those five or six days, you will understand if she remembered them. The Buretta began to pat her with one hand, pretending to have every intention of getting serious with her, then, with a jerk, he raised her skirt, and slammed the package on her fur, so hard that it sponged her all over. from under the tits to the wool socks rolled up on the feet. The Old Woman began to scream at the top of her lungs, almost astonished by her stench. The four with the Buretta on their heads ran away dying of

laughter: and their uàh uàh ah ah aaaaaa could be heard all the way to the bottom of the Circles, until they disappeared towards the Registry Office, mixing with the explosions of the motorbikes.

A week later they returned again. By now they had taken the habit. Buretta unclipped a piece of paper again, and, with the package behind his back, and the others already laughing behind him, went in search of the subject. This time, however, the young gentlemen were expected at the Cerchi. All the pimps, in those four or five evenings, had come to station themselves, down in the lawn, instead of staying in the square, far away, mingling among the customers who came and went. There was also Giovanni Patacchiola, the zaraffa, who was actually the moral leader, given that the old lady had taken the buggering. So when the four Parish undertakers arrived there in the middle of the meadow, and approached a whore, she immediately grabbed them head-on, shaking her bag high and shouting the dead at him. The four remained a little stunned by that welcome, taken aback. Buretta stood there, with the package of shit in his hand, looking at it with wild eyes under his mad cap. Then, from the shadow under the embankment, the pimps came forward in a line, followed by the Old Woman and the others who squealed like chickens.

Patacchiola immediately went under Buretta, who dropped the parcel: it opened, spilling the contents between the feet of the two rivals. There was no need for explanations: Buretta, however, wasn't the type to go along with it, and they started beating each other straight away. First the two of them, and then all the others, and they massacred each other. The northern brunette found his jaw broken, he was spitting out blood and teeth, the other two red-haired brothers, who had tried to cut, fared better, with swollen eyes and kicked ribs. The Buretta was not tender: at a pinata from Patacchiola, he fell to the ground, long, on the mud. But he pretended to be upset: and as soon as Patacchiola turned to go and disembowel the others too, Buretta jumped up again, holding a bayaffett in his hand, which he had meanwhile unsheathed: he jumped up, and soaked four five Punched Patacchiola on the back, and this time he was the one who fell, screaming his soul out.

During the period that the zaraffa was in the hospital and then in the cage, the Old Woman thought of killing two birds with one stone: that is, of unloading the zaraffa and, at the same time, her son, Shitter.

On the same night of the stabbings at Cerchi, as the zaraffa fell, and everyone escaped, some here, some there, the Vecchiona, instead of taking the thirteen for Monteverde, took the twenty-three, and then the trolleybus, and arrived at Ponte Milvio.

There, under the Ponte Nuovo, between the Tiber and Villa Glori, there are two villages of shacks, one larger, and one smaller, which looks like Alice in Wonderland, with many hovels, one round and one pizzly, one made with a caravan, one with a car, a green one and a blue one, scattered here and there among the rubble and piles of rubbish. In one of these shacks lived an old friend of the Vecchiona's, who had been young girls together with the nuns. It's been a long time since this one said to him: «Come away from me, who's going to keep you? What, you stink of being better?»: So the Old Woman took advantage and went to stay with this companion: as soon as she was there, she began to secretly visit again, in those parts, Via Flaminia, Ponte Milvio, Acqua Acetosa...

A week, a month passed, and the day came that the zaraffa showed up again. He had done the research he had to do, slowly, calmly, he had asked this and that, all people from the underworld, he had made an agreement with a pimp who had made a fortune and drove all over Rome, and blessed souls. Until the moment came, one evening, when he showed up at the shack of the Old Woman's friend: she was out beating at that time. But he sat down under the shed, between two or three flower pots, smoking in the dark. When at the first light of day, the Old Woman, with her bones all broken, limping, arrived in front of the hut, she was so tired that she didn't even see him at the door: or perhaps it was because of the sun, which was rising, fresh, dazzling behind the hovels and the trees. He got up, threw out the knife, and screaming at once, like a beast, stuck it ten or twelve times in her belly.

So Shitter lost all hope. He had never been a serious professional thief: they always took him, in Pietralata, but as a bully, as an old expert; and they were always small taps, which yielded little or nothing, and how many dogs there were around that bone!

Besides this, Shitter was sick: more or less he had always been sick, but now he was actually in the toilet all day. And, along with the stomach ache, he had another ailment, the name of which he never quite learned, which made him swell all over, as if he had gas leaks under his skin. Now his neck swelled, now a lip, now an eyelid: his hair had almost all fallen out on his

forehead, and the remaining curls were all on his neck. Ever since his mother had become a Latina, and so she had taken away his salary, there were more days that he didn't eat than those that he ate. During the day he went to get a bowl of soup from the friars. In the evening a little here, a little there. When he had money, sometimes as much as twenty-thirty sacks, he would spend it all in a single night, with some whore.

One day Shitter disappeared, the next day no one saw him around, and not even on the third day. On the fourth day some of his friends had a job to do, in a sweet lace shop in Prati, and they went looking for him. They entered the shack in Via delle Messi d'Oro where he lived, and found themselves with their noses against his shoes. He had hanged himself from a ceiling beam, and how he had managed to resist this dirty beam for three days, with that weight, he just couldn't understand.

Yawning, Zucabbo tightened the clothes with his belt and threw them into the pile, immediately leaving with a sheep's whistle towards the trampoline. Instead, Tommaso didn't take a bath: while Zucabbo swam, he remained there crouched on the sand with his back against the sheer wall of the bank full of dry roots, in a bit of shade.

All around there were dry reeds. The handles of the flowers were also dry, more than a meter high, piled up like a plantation, on the other side, towards the water: they were black, rusty, they shattered when touched, like ash, like burnt paper.

In the midst of these, thickly packed, there were others, like a plantation within a plantation: they were those white flowers, which when you blow on them, fall to pieces, as big as fists, on the frayed stems. They were left with only the bone, because all the white stuff had fallen on the ground, on the sandy grass and on the sghecia. But, you can see, nearby, on some embankment, a pile of straw, a patch of lawn, a plant had caught fire and, having charred, it had all become black dust: the air, blowing, had carried around here and there that dust, and it had dirtied everything: wherever you placed your hand, you found it black.

This dust covered everything, the pile of dried flowers, the white rubbish that had fallen on top, the nettles, those herbs that you see everywhere in summer, that crawl like snakes, dry and tarnished, the piles of rubbish, with the jars, the boxes of medicines overturned, the shards, the shit, all sunk in that undergrowth, under the baking sun, black too: by now September, if you called him, he would answer.

Tommaso, waiting to report back to the party section, tried to fall asleep a little, but couldn't, due to the sun burning his brain. And the hours never passed. His heart continued to beat strongly every time he thought about it, about introducing himself to the Pietralata section, to his classmates: it seemed impossible to him that they shouldn't welcome him with open arms, better than a brother.

He hadn't even taken off his shoes, which had become filled with sand and dirt. Everyone around was bathing in the black, greasy water, with streams of drool passing in bits down the stream.

They screamed like wretches, arguing, the smallest ones at the end, at the curve, under two or three twisted reeds, the biggest ones, like Zucabbo, further here, among the piles of clothes tied with belts. Then they started playing cards, crouched down, under the companionway.

Tommaso also got involved with Zucabbo, Brooklyn and Droga, who were two half-baked rookies, who couldn't even stand up, they spat as they spoke, barely uttering the words, with drooling mouths and wild eyes. Two or three hands were done, until the sun began to go down.

Then a fagot came to the other bank and began to look: the kids knew him, and, including Zucabbo, they jumped into the water and went to the other side to shake his money.

Tommaso arrived back at the section while it was still early. But he waited there. Even Persichini was no longer there, but he was open, and in fact from there, in the tavern beyond the broken door, voices could be heard. Tommaso entered, sat down on a small chair, only with the red flag, and began to leaf through some newspapers, which were there on the floor, piled up in the dust.

But he couldn't bear to read, because those voices, nearby, distracted him: he couldn't distinguish them well since one of the small houses next door kept pigs, and they grunted, mixing with the voices.

Tommaso then stood up and went to sit next to the door, listening. He began to catch us a little. There was a voice, grumpy, like a slightly drunk elderly person, who was saying: «He would have to die to be reborn! Eh, in my time, in Ponte's time, there was life! When I was twenty, there was no chain holding me! » He said: «Aaaah», like when you take a drop of wine from the glass, and continued: «Before, twenty years old was enough to know the world, now not even sixty is enough for you! Look at the blows I have on me, look!"

But a younger voice cut him off, hastily, and said: «If you're dead and you're still talking, let's move on a bit! We're coming then!"

The one who spoke first made a bit of a fuss: from the voice it must have been a certain Di Nicola, an elderly man, about fifty years old, who Tommaso had known for a long time, since he was a boy. «Aòh, guys», Di Nicola then said, in a low voice, «let it be clear that what I do is for you... because you don't work, and five thousand in your pocket comes in handy! But I don't want that one day there will be a stink and my name will come out! Oh, besides yes, yes sir! This no!"

A graveyard voice answered him, that of Cazzimperio, who had two teeth in his mouth like a hundred year old man: «But how can they have fun! What, are you joking? And then they might as well get rid of the blame if someone bears it! Do you think that four of us were going to pay? Hey!»

“And who should bear it?"

This one who spoke like a broken gramophone, with a deep voice that crooned, was Delli Fiorelli.

Cazzimperio immediately replied, drooling: «Whoever loses less is clear, isn't it? We can't stand under him..." Di Nicola certainly taught. «... or to me! One of you two! From bad to bad, what do you lose? It will be a matter of you never coming in here anymore, and what do you care! It's up to these people to keep quiet, because they can't do it, 'no scandal, gone heart!"

«Aòh, as if you say», said Delli Fiorelli, «as long as it lasts it's vegetables!» "Well," he added impatiently, "how much did you go out last night?"

"One hundred bijetti, twenty sacks," said the voice of the fourth who was there, and whom Tommaso did not recognize. «That's the sum, you know! You can't get any more than that!"

«He has from them the one who tears the bijetti!» thought Thomas.

Over there they were silent: they shared the mess, and everyone was silent, looking at their own cue, the pancotta of tartassated piatte.

"But what are they doing?" thought Thomas. «Do you give them tickets? Which bijetti? They toil over their prom tickets! Oh yes, it's clear, the tickets from the raffle... Delli Fiorelli gives them back, instead of waste... You understand, these judges, if they get five sacks for each one! »

There was complete silence over there: they were busy dividing up the money. You could hear the pigs rooting beyond the wall, in the other house,

and the screams of the children, who, in that boiling air, were playing between the houses.

He started talking about Nocola again: «Guys», he said, «as if he were saying, here it's five sacks for one a week: when it's the end of the month it's twenty sacks, with twenty sacks you'll get by... and I'll pay for it rent! And then a few other little things will slip out, if we place this wine..."

«How many liters do you use per day, here?» the ticket collector asked Cazzimperio dryly.

«One hundred liters, two barrels», said Cazzimperio, with a dissatisfied look, and a sweet voice, «some more, some less...» «I don't see any compensation here!» he added, mumbling badly, full of tender despondency.

«As there is no compensation!» Delli Fiorelli hinted. «You can get the five bags, eh?, because if we screw up and this guy, and now you don't want to screw yourself up! 'This shit... I don't like them, no no! Here you too must get the money, if you want it. And no eh!»

Di Nicola intervened, calmly convincing Cazzimperio: «But why? If we can, if we can, we can put another five bags a month in Bologna, will they stink? Even we can pay forty lire per litre, from these idiots, as 'o pay for the party... This is my job! All you have to do is place it in here! When you put a thousand of ours into three thousand liters a month, you know how much it is!

"Damn them!" thought Tommaso, "here they even sell the cross of Christ!"

That Persichini from before came in busily, with his black snout, his light frowning eye and his gold tooth in his half-open mouth as he looked around.

He winked at Tommaso, and, immediately getting to work, without looking at him in the face anymore, he said: "Help me set up the desks for the meeting!"

Without paying attention to that abrupt tone, because he knew that was what was needed in those cases, Tommaso got busy too. He went there and began to carry into the great room the desks that were piled one on top of the other in the office and in the tavern. They put the desks away, lined up in front of the desk, and soon after people began to arrive.

They stood in front, in the small courtyard, in a little shade, and waited, sweating.

After a while, a smaller group of people came, with big heads, all from the village. It was a meeting held for the diffusion of the press, and for the preparation of the Unity celebration in Pietralata: therefore both young and old people were present. There was also the person in charge of the press and propaganda of the federation: he came, entered, and behind him all the others, slowly wiping away their sweat: they crowded inside, still standing, and little by little there was a stench of dusty and sweaty clothes that took your breath away.

«Who is that guy, that I have to go down there?» Tommaso asked Persichini, teaching a person who seemed to him to be the secretary, given that everyone was following him. It was a certain Passalacqua, who he had already known for many years.

"Can't you see it?" said Persichini.

«May I introduce myself?» Tommaso asked, with a bit of spit in his mouth.

«What, do you want a push?» the other one always said foolishly, as he had other things on his mind. Tommaso started to go there to that Passalacqua: but at that moment Di Nicola took him aside, no doubt starting to lick his feet, because who knows how many lies he was telling him: and Tommaso went to Olmo.

Then they immediately set fire to the discussion, and everyone began to take their places on the benches: Tommaso had to resign himself to waiting for it to end, standing there on one side.

He remained pressed with one shoulder to the wall, standing around, while the meeting began, and the one from the federation prepared the ground for the speeches of the others.

Oh, he knew him well, Di Nicola, and also the fourth one, the one with the tickets, a certain Di Santo, who was sitting on the bench next to Cazzimperio. Delli Fiorelli instead placed himself among the young people, who were waiting with drawn snouts, like so many Abramucci, for their turn to come, for them to talk about the party and the dance.

"I know you, I know you!" thought Tommaso, squinting at Di Nicola, who, innocent like Samuele, was sitting on his desk, with his checkered shirt on his black rump. "You're good, you are!" In fact, he had met him three or four years earlier, and, by the way, precisely in a business involving bullies. This Di Nicola, with a rented truck, was going to Cisterna, making fun, where he had bought some fields, entire, as he was, of watermelons,

also making fun. Tommaso and the other two or three gravediggers, whom he had picked up while they were playing football at Monte del Pecoraro, cost him a fortune. They arrived in Cisterna, and they had to do everything, collect the watermelons in the field, carry them to the truck, load them. Then off to Rome. On the street, through the villages, they threw half watermelons after the girls, having fun popping them on the asphalt. Once they arrived in Rome, they went to the market, to Piazza Quadrata, to Piazza Vittorio, where it was. They unloaded the watermelons by hand, piled them in a pile, keeping guard all night, with some whores. Early in the morning, as soon as the sun came out, they began to sell, sanding each other and shouting: «Aòh, there's a fire! We need firefighters! Chiochiommeri! Chiochiommeri!» Di Nicola watched and grabbed the money.

However, he had met Di Santo in another way. He was even more of a boy, almost with skirts. He had broken his head and was crying, dripping with blood, in a corner of the village. Di Santo passed by, picked him up and took him to the emergency room, shouting to the others around who were watching without moving: «What? Do you want him to bleed to death? He's here, boy! » «Let's take him to the hospital!» said a young man who was very happy with the news. «But what a hospital! Let's take him to the emergency room!" said Di Santo, twisting his mouth. He took the handkerchief and put it on Tommaso's head, pushing him with a hand on his shoulder, and every now and then bending down to say to him: «Oh, does it hurt? Huh? Does it hurt you?"

"Yes, yes!" thought Tommaso as he walked away from his friends, with his hands in his pockets. They were all old acquaintances in there, with those gunshot faces, in the stench of stained clothes and smoke.

But most of all, the secretary of the section, sitting next to the young man who talked and talked, looked the most.

«You want it, yes I know you!» he thought to her, with an old fox's smile, sweet and benevolent under her dry eyes. He remembered the scene as if it were now: the beatings they had given each other! The mess they had armed! Riot stuff in Santa Calla, old drunkards. It was an evening like this, warm, in August, it felt like day. The moon was a fire, purple in color, and dyed everything purple, dust, rubbish, shacks. People were walking around half naked, outdoors. Through the villages, through the old meadows, the world seemed like a gypsy camp. Windows and doors, all wide open, with rags on display: some were laughing, some were crying, in

one shack they were having a feast, in another someone was dying; and everywhere barricades of young men dancing around singing, their vests flapping over their trousers.

The old people were under the pergolas, among the reeds, in the taverns; and among these Passalacqua.

He and another, an old horseman, had started to say something about their animals: they were both horse riders, and each one was saying that his animal was able to pull the little carriage better up the little slope of a dirt road where they were staying. work. One word led to another, little by little, little by little, they got more and more out of spite, cooked by the wine as they were, who were doting on each other, and began to fight.

They started inside the tavern, with all the other neni around trying to divide them, drunk too. It seemed that they wanted to stop, when instead they came out, followed by the whole gang, all with white or bald hair: they hung up in front of the front door, under the electric light, dimmed by the moon.

Drunk as they were, they beat each other in fits and starts, gripped by chest attacks, a punch on the stomach, banfete, a kick in the underbelly.

So, beating each other and shouting, they moved here and there, and the others followed, trying to divide them up and tell them to end it.

They moved against certain hills in the countryside towards the Aniene, then back down, towards the inn.

Other people had gathered, young men, children, and they were watching, also running here and there, according to the movements, like a handful of dry leaves turned over by the wind, or a flock of sparrows. Tommaso was also there, half naked too, and black like Andalù.

By now it seemed that the two were fed up, and they stood a little apart, each one of their closest friends, with their faces as red as blood, their teeth bared under their gray beards. Suddenly Passalacqua made a leap, ran like a villain, towards the inn: around there was a fence, made of half-detached and rotten boards. He attached himself to one, shook it and uprooted it: with this he began to beat the unfortunate woman, and everyone ran away, some here, some there. Even the other horseman, with his tail between his legs, seemed to be fighting it, lol locker. Instead he ran into the tavern and immediately resurrected with a chair in his hands, starting to give chairs here and there, like a madman, too. Under those volleys, now one ran away, now the other ran away, and all those present following, there was now a

procession of them, running, frrrrr in one direction, frrrrr in the other, partly trying to stop them, partly hoping to witness the moment when they split their heads.

Suddenly, while he was running up and down, Tommaso saw a pile of clothes on the ground, they were Passalacqua's jacket and mop. He bent down, looked around, grabbed it and away he went.

Someone who knew him, however, had made fun of him from some door. And, as soon as they had made peace, he had warned Passalacqua, who was looking for his things: «Torquato's son took it!» Passalacqua and the other then went to Tommasino, in the shack. Tommasino was inside, his mother in the courtyard. «Is your boyfriend here?» Passalacqua asked with an evil eye. «You have to have my jacket and my hat!»

Hearing the voices, Tommasino immediately relaxed the movement and came out, clothes in hand. «I saw them there on the ground», he said, all innocent and a good boy, «and I knew they were yours. Then I saw all those beatings, I got scared, and I brought him here!"

«You did well, you did well!» said Passalacqua. Indeed, he gave him five hundred lire, and then he wanted at all costs to make him come and drink with them: "What fear!" he said. «We were joking! 'Namo, come and have a drink too! Er wine chases away thoughts!

Now he stood there, getting busy, next to the young man from the federation, who was silent, and listened to the others talking. The time had come to discuss the party, the dance: and it was the turn of the young people. One said this, one said that, all the usual rubbish. But the young man still listened to them with respect and interest. He listened with his elbows resting on the desk, attentive, with clear eyes, almost white, they were so light blue. He must have been quite tall, yes you could see he had a nice pair of shoulders, but he was shy, when he spoke he struggled, and even if he said a cheerful joke, now that they were discussing the dance, there was a slightly sad light in his eyes, worried, like a kid.

«Asshole, drink, you know!» Tommasci thought to himself as he spun it. «These people are really listening to you! But what the f... do you care? As long as they clap their hands at the last moment, that's what they can do for you!"

An associate of Delli Fiorelli's had begun to give a speech on the dance: hearing him Tommaso became joking: «Listen to this!» he thought. «What a

waste of breath! Did he come down from Sgùrgola? What, was he playing bagpipes? Good boy! You're exposing the national problem!"

"Talk about dancing!" she thought, almost laughing out loud. «That one in his village between tarentelle and marzucchi, he was the capoquadrija! But she spits in the air and knock me down! »

He responded to the intervention, shy, a little confused, but determined, and speaking like a printed book, that of the federation. "Speak speak!" thought Thomas, «that here they make you do at the end of Cicero, at all! He says that Americans are in America! » He collected himself a little, concentrating and putting on a mean face: "I'll almost tell you when you've finished wasting your breath, I'll tell you how things are going here!" I'll sing you a song that will move you!"

He gave a sidelong glance at Delli Fiorelli: "What a farce!" he thought, «yes, the cricket will jump, in five minutes, if you're not deaf, you'll hear the bang I'll make! Be careful!"

«I'll keep you all like this, in here!» she thought again, clenching her fist tightly in her pocket, and passing around a sticky look, with a hint of threat beneath the cheerfulness.

He was sweating and melting: the sun was still high, a flame, on the horizon of the miserable huddles of Pietralata. The companions continued to argue for a good while before soaking, discussing this and that, in the bowl.

Finally the meeting ended: it was time, but they still stood and chatted for a while, especially around this Passalacqua man. Tommaso went there, took a liking to him, waiting for the right moment. While he was already heading towards the exit, he ran after him and took him by the elbow, thinking: «What, are you running away now? What, you're worse than Fanfani, aren't you?", And he said to him loudly, blocking himself: "Sorry, aaaa... allow me a minute?"

Passalacqua looked at him, completely available, with his face like an old shoe like a slut that was a balm.

"Mwell?" she said.

Tommaso pulled him a little aside, into a quieter corner of the courtyard.

"Listen..." he began, "I've wanted you to come and say this for a long time... But I've never had the chance, I just got out of the hospital, and you know how it is, when someone those places, you have to stay close... Well,

these are the things... I've always had the idea, eh!» He stopped himself and looked at him fixedly, with his palms open forward and his scandalized, sacred eye. «That shouldn't put other things in your head...» he continued. «I'm poor, I'm working class too... And then I don't know if it's come to your attention, but in any case, hurry up and let me know, as I'm busy down in Forlanini... I know I was the one who announced the announcement, I was the one who was snooping around to help Gujermi... Do you know Gujermi, the secretary of the hospital section?... I did what I could! So this should be enough for you to understand who I am and how I think..."

He took a breather after finishing the first part of his speech: the other was looking at him, consenting, with his spoon against his neck, waiting for where he was going.

«But there is a fact», Tommaso immediately continued, «that I have never joined the party like that, because I didn't see the importance... I thought: enough of this idea, and here we are!»

He clapped his hands two or three times together with his palms open, as if he had concluded a deal and there was peace.

«But instead», he continued, «I see that this is not the case, I also want to keep my card in my pocket, like all of you. Here if there were to be a lot of fights and fights, there must be room for everyone, bad and bad weather if there's room for you, there's room for me too: so I might as well be on your level!"

He had begun this last part with bitter eyes, and ended it with a louder voice, since he was expressing his right, logical, regular, which was how it had to be.

Centered by those arguments, the companion remained silent, with a gray face, as if he were chewing a bitter booger, looking at Tommaso with a clinical eye.

«Tell me», concluded Tommaso, «what should I do, who should I go to, to sign me?»

Passalacqua was silent for a little while, looking at him, and then said: «Well, it's the most regular thing in the world! You don't know two of the party, what can they introduce you to? Come with these two people, show up, and in five minutes you'll be fine too: just stick the sticker!»

She looked at him again, sympathetically, and clapped a hand on his shoulder, saying: "I'm pleased!"

And so it was: after a few days, Tommaso showed up at the section, with the two people who had to act as witnesses, that is Delli Fiorelli himself and Gricio, he was marked, he paid what he had to pay: and finally he managed to dip the bread inside the sauce: he put the card in his pocket, ready to fight for the red flag too.

5. ETERNAL HUNGER

The calculations were easy to do: of the four thousand lire that the boss passed to Tommasino at the last minute of the last hour on Saturday evening, just before leaving the office, two thousand were for the payment of the suit; from the other two thousand it was necessary to deduct the money for the tram for the whole week: on the 209th ten lire in the morning, twenty in the evening makes 180 lire, the same on the 8th, because Tommasino got off at the end of the first section and the rest was done at feet: 180 plus 180 equals 360. He had to smoke ten nationals a day, they made 600 lire. He kept one bag for himself, in his pocket: the other he gave to his family, because his parents agreed that they would be content like this for that month. Before putting on the blouse, we ran away with half a body to spend Sunday. But now? With Irene he couldn't go walking back and forth all day along the sidewalks of Garbatella, or the meadows, from two in the afternoon to eight in the evening. It was Saturday, and it was necessary at all costs to get the corn, barely half a body, for the following day. Thirty lire remained in his pocket, sprinkled on cigarettes; plus the forty rides on the tram made seventy. The newly holstered four thousand could not be touched: he had stuffed them into the pocket inside his jacket, and it was as if they didn't even exist.

Tommaso stopped working late, like every Saturday: he left Via della Giuliana, where he had found work with a greengrocer, because he certainly couldn't go to the markets anymore. Headed to his destination, he took Via Giulio Cesare, which was starting to get dark: it was already September. Then he extended the crank. At the end of Via Giulio Cesare he cut towards Piazza Cavour, passed under the Mole Adriana, arrived at Borgo Panigo: he crossed Corso Vittorio, and found himself in Campo dei Fiori.

Via dei Chiavari was there in the middle, with its uneven pavement and its rows of facades, like a gut.

Halfway down the street there were greenish neon lights above a white door: it was the Vittorio, a little place where they made two films. Some kids were standing in front of the billboards, with their hands in their pockets, looking around to see if there was an opportunity to turn in.

Tommaso got there quickly, serious, without even looking at those others who remained outside empty-handed. He entered, quickly took the

ticket, leaving everything he had in his pocket to the cashier, and took the ticket.

First of all, he had to try to discard the mask. So he slowly pulled aside the black velvet curtain and snuck in against the wall, leaning on one shoulder, and pretending to have been there for a while, with his eyes fixed on the screen. They were playing "The Bailiff's Princess" and you could see some Hawaiian girls, with crowns of flowers around their necks, spiraling around Bob Hope: and as he looked at them, he made a silly sound with his mouth, because of the taste he felt, and distorted his eyes as if he were shocked.

Seeing that the mask was not nearby, with a tired look, Tommaso moved away from the wall, giving a sharp tap with his shoulder, and half stretched, to be able to take a look around. The stalls were small, and a low wooden partition divided the second seats from the first ones: which were two or three rows of seats at the back.

In front, as usual, there was the pipinara of Campo dei Fiori or the giudietti of Via Arenula or Portico d'Ottavia, with some mandrucones, all dishevelled, eating fusariums and bruscholini. Behind, beyond the passage between the rows, there was the bulk of the audience: other women, but without boys, some unemployed people on social security, and the rabble of young people. Back there, in the spaces against the walls, to the right and left, there were also people standing: young men, kids and some elderly people.

Tommaso crossed the room, went against the wall on the other side, and stuck himself in the space between the chairs and the wall, where those people were standing. He placed himself in the middle, returning to lean, with his other shoulder, against the wall, rubbed and polished by all those who had leaned against it before him.

Going back to half-stretch, all grumpy because he felt like a serious boy, and not a newbie like the bedraggled ones in sweaters who were milling around, he cast another exploratory look.

He saw the movement, detached himself from the wall and went up the corridor, up towards the partition that separated the second seats from the first. In the last rows there was a seat: black, Tommaso went to sit down: there was a random guy there, who, even though he saw him from a distance and in the dark, immediately struck him as unfamiliar. He sat down

in the empty seat, with his knees propped against the back of the chair in front, and ran wild. Then, like a whip, the lights came on.

Tommaso immediately sat up straighter, acting indifferent and looked around almost angrily, turning his neck slightly inside the collar of his shirt which seemed to have been rubbed with a clove of garlic stained with coal: it was Saturday, and therefore it had been a week since he was wearing that shirt and that purple tie all screwed up.

The audience, under the light, looked like when you lift a stone and find everything underneath full of worms: a pile of worms twisted one over the other, moving and crawling from all sides, twisting their heads and tails, half go crazy, hit by the light as they are.

The last two rows of the second seats were all full of kids, with here and there an old gray man, standing like a stone in the middle of a trickle of mud. There were some from twelve to twenty years old, and they were standing around, some with their knees against the back of the chair in front, some even with their feet on it, it was empty, and some with their legs on those of the companion next to them.

They gave each other punches and blows, or, from behind the shoulders of the companion next to them, they gave a few slaps on the head of the one further away, sitting back down to eat the bruschini indifferently, with their eyes laughing at him. They had some trousers that were all tattered, with two inches of grease and dust, all worn and shiny on the front, that you could even see a few white stripes of underwear. The men among them stood serious, almost offended, and made themselves as small as they could between the arms of the chairs.

In the corridors along the walls there was a lot of comings and goings: a young man would get up, with a start, and very slowly, with a mischievous walk, he would go, chewing and grinning, as if he intended to do who knows what, towards the toilets. Two or three little boys went there together, laughing and talking loudly: an elderly person went there slowly, bent over, blowing his nose. The velvet curtains in front of the doors were all going up and down.

The little guy next to Tommaso was smoking, holding his elbow above the bracelet, with his hand high and limp, and the cigarette between his fingers. Tommaso looked at him, and he too turned his eyes on him.

The lights dimmed again. Tommaso immediately spread his legs, placing his left leg next to that of his neighbor: and he stood there waiting.

He sat still, like a cat when it looks at a dog, on the dilapidated chair: with his face where the brown creaks merged with the red that covered it like a shell. The little round face with a pointed nose and a full but almost lipless mouth came out from the collar of his shirt like a sheave from a paper bag: at the back his hair was already a little long, even though he had cut it short, and it stuck out a little. a little above the collar: at the top they stood straight, around the clerical, like a boy. The little guy didn't do anything. He continued to look around, with glances in all directions, as if he had a nervous streak on him. Tommaso spread his legs even further, sliding his ass along the chair.

Meanwhile the vermin had resumed its life in the dark, calm and silent. However, every now and then you could hear laughter here and there, voices arguing over a cigarette, or the background sounds of those who had already seen the film twice and were bored.

The fagot still wasn't moving. Tommaso was pissed off. «What are you waiting for, you asshole!» he thought to himself. He changed position, giving a blow with his back that almost broke the back of the chair where he was sitting, and another with his knee that almost broke the back of the chair in front of him.

The guy continued to look around, and every now and then, looking around, he also looked at Tommaso next to him.

«But damn you!» Tommaso thought more and more negatively. «Hey!» And he snorted, continuing to shuffle and move. He had begun to lower his eyes at all that movement. They went on like this for about ten minutes. Tommaso had spread his legs so much and had slid down with his butt on the chair so much that he sank a little further onto the floor full of splatters of spit, pieces of bruschini and maybe even some piss, when necessary. Meanwhile Tommaso had wandered where he went to look at his neighbor, turning his eyes here and there a lot. He went to look at a young man who had taken off his jacket two or three rows ahead, and all you could see was his military-style shaved back head and his shoulders with a nice blue and gray cowboy shirt. This was why Tommaso got even more angry. «But fuck...!» he said to himself, "What's that better than me? What a farce, I'm the damned thing to you!"

Adjusting himself angrily in his chair, he occasionally nudged his neighbor, who, in addition to looking at the one in front, lowered his eyes more and more often on him. She teased him badly with her elbow, like

someone who finds a door closed and all rickety, who thinks it will open at the first push, but instead it resists and he then gradually gets pissed off, shoving it. "So, what do we do?" Tommaso thought almost aloud. The one next to him, in the end, perhaps had to say to himself: "Come on, get him away from me, go!" And suddenly he held out his hand.

When he had finished quickly, Tommasino, satisfied, sat back down without haste.

Then he raised his head, and looked at the guy next to him.

That was nothing: he was now gripped by a great interest in the film. Tommasino watched it for a few moments with his forehead wrinkled, his eyes dazed, and his mouth pulled in with a grimace that, completely peaceful, wanted to say: "How much you like this film, eh?"

Then suddenly he elbowed him.

He roused himself, gave him a look as if he had forgotten him, and stood like that for a moment. Then, just as Tommasino raised his hand to rub his thumb and forefinger as if he had some booger between his fingertips, he said: "Oh yes, sorry!" He said so all thoughtful and courteous.

Tommasino then said good-naturedly: "What, you forgot, were you there?"

«Zi», said the other with a shake of his head, moving all over as he munched in the bottom of a pocket of his trousers. He threw a shot.

Without taking it in his hand, Tommasino looked at it by pulling its neck to see it up close. He wanted to make sure if it was really a bag or not, hypothetically, a half bag. It was really stupid, there was nothing that could be done. He put himself back in his place, little by little. Then he said calmly: "What, give me a piece of cake, give me?"

The other one was left with his plate in mid-air: «And let's go! And take it! », he said disgustedly, almost whimpering.

Tommasino didn't even consider the attempt: "What, are you giving me alms?" he said, still calm.

"Kill!" he said, dragging his voice, with the grimace that little girls make when someone wrongs them, "that's not enough for you, what?" «And what are you? of gold?" he added, as if he felt sick.

Tommasino made pc pc with his tongue, against the dry palate. He raised his eyebrows further between the wrinkles of his forehead.

"Put out the money!" he said.

The other one sneered at him. Tommasino had already turned black. You couldn't speak loudly because otherwise those who were around would understand. But Tommasino certainly would have said those words in such a low voice and in such a breath, even if they had been at the bottom of the cliff. The faggot put his foot down. He aimed them right at the peeling legs of the chair in front, and sat down on him, still moving everything but this time with an offended look and with great determination.

«The money», Tommaso repeated.

«What, didn't I give you the money? Hey, here it is!" he did the other, nervously stretching out his bow again.

This time Tommasino didn't say anything. He just sat up straighter in his chair, propping up his creaking bracelets with his elbows.

The other took advantage of that silence to add some reasons of his own. "You could have told me before!" he said, "what, you don't have a tongue?" Ah, I won't give you more than these hundred lire, ssa! Say what you like, but I won't give you more than these hundred lire! I can't! But then ask everyone about me, about Idoletto, ask, and see if there is one, but one of the number, who won't tell you: so, look, Idoletto is a friend, he is! But I like to draw them first. Yes, yes, yes, patience. Aòh, what a vvoi! I'm so fascinating, I know, that I find as many males as I want, I find!

He sat down better against the back, satisfied with that last shot, and still vibrant with indignation, rejoicing. Tommasino approached him again shoulder to shoulder, and, without expression, and almost without a voice, repeated, for the third time: "Hunt the money."

He had lost the desire to joke, and even to wait, he was determined to do anything. The fagot began to look at him with a bit of fear, his face white, his heart pounding. He stood there silently, not moving. Tommasino stretched out a hand. "Give me some of that," he said. Quickly, the fagot placed it on him, then sitting down more comfortably in his chair, and taking on the air of someone who has now done his duty, and no longer has anything to do with anyone. At that moment his usher came over there, accompanying a fat man with a woman with his vented drain: he made them sit right behind Tommasino and the fagot. Tommasino was silent again: and after a while the fagot, casting a few glances here and there, made a gesture of getting up.

Tommasino took him by the arm and forced him to sit down again.

"Where are you going?" he calmed down.

«What, do I have to stay here until tonight?» said the other uncertainly.

«Nooooo!» said Thomas. "So what do you want?"

"The dough," said Tommasino, baring his yellow teeth with a little saliva drooling around them.

"Darnit!" said the faggot, "but didn't I give it to you?"

Tommasino smiled. «And what are you doing with a pot?» he said. The faggot hissed. "Damn it," he said, almost with tears in his voice: he angrily put his hand in his pocket and, all crumpled up and almost reduced to a wad, took out another bag. She handed it to Tommasino. This, as before, he took it calmly, and calmly stretched it out very slowly and looked at it carefully to see that it wasn't instead fifty lire: seeing that it was really a piece of money, shriveled up, he folded it up and put it in his pocket to keep company at the first.

After a while, the fagot, keeping quiet, started again as if to get up and leave, saying: "Bye, handsome, I greet you." But Tommasino, always calm, approached him without paying much attention, as if he were chasing a fly, with a hand on his shoulder: «Hey, what a chorus!» he said, "and stay a little longer, right?" "I'm sorry, I've already seen the film, I have to leave..." said the other, his voice trembling. «Aòh, you want to stop!» he made a loud kiss that he had come to have with the woman right behind them. The two immediately stood still, like those beasts that pretend to be dead. They watched a bit of film, straight and good. Then slowly, Tommasino took a look behind him, over his shoulder. The kisser was a big guy, all sweaty and with four hairs on his head, white as a pillow, and if by chance a slap landed it was from him. Now determined to finish it, Tommasino turned askance at the faggot, with poisoned eyes and a tight mouth.

"Come on," he said again, "do you think you can get away with it like this?"

"What do you want?" the faggot continued again, just to gain time, also scared for that other guy in the back who was acting fanatical because he was with the mecca, "I've just given you two of them: it seems to me that's enough." ! What, ar Vittorio gives more than two cents?"

«Whatever», said Tommasino, «doesn't make me lose my mind, now, eh!»

The other saw that Tommasino was really about to lose his patience: he approached him to be able to talk to him better, and played his last card. «A little boy», he said, «and they are reasonable... What, if I didn't have any

money for you? I don't have any money at all, I don't have any... You have to believe me... What do you think I'm a gentleman? What am I doing well? See... I'm a poor guy, worse than you... I've been unemployed for more than a year, and whoever supports me and my mother is... They're human, until they die... I swear to you, I'll never go back again, when it's 'a plate, and even two, yes I have it, I'll give it to you, even for nothing... Let's go and eat pizza together...»

«There's no such thing as chatter here», Tommaso grinned. «Give me the money, or I'm... yours».

The faggot was now trembling with fear. His face had gone grey. He put his hand in his pocket and put out another one, almost crying, but before holding it out to Tommaso he said: "Well, look." Tommasino lowered his eyes. The faggot turned his bags inside out, showing the dirty lining. «This is the last word I have», he said, «now I don't even have deaf people on the tram, I have to make the way on foot». Tommasino took the third shot from his hand and put it in his pocket with the others.

Another two or three minutes passed. Then the faggot tried to make some friends, you never know. "Does," he said pathetically, "do you think what you've done is beautiful? Take the money away from a poor guy who doesn't even have anything to eat!"

«Hey», said Tommasino, «how much you cry! What, are you always crying? All the same! Always say that you don't have any money, you'll remember, and instead keep the money hidden..."

At these last words an expression of even greater fear passed over the face of the faggot, who, now that he had been in the sun, had cheered up a little. But Giobbo, pretending nothing had happened, stretched a little, then placed a hand on his cheek, with the tips of his fingers and his little finger raised, and looking three-quarters, with his chin pulled like the stars when they act posh, he tried to throw laughing things: «A fijo de na slut!» he said, «you really fooled me! I'm fine with it! I'm really crazy, I know! What, I don't know that the deal has to be done first?"

"But what pacts!" Tommaso grumbled. "Are you! I promise! You the grain, you have to take it out!"

«Now, handsome boy», said the faggot, still trying to be joking, «I can't even find a breccola, if you turn me all over! You can't take the blood off a turnip!"

Tommaso looked at him silently. He smiled a little, being friendly. "Look for some money that you'll have in your gloves," he said, as if it were a bet made like this, for satisfaction.

«But what trouble», said the other, trembling. Tommaso continued to grin, illuminated from within by a thought that filled his dry eyes with mischief and joy. Then after laughing one last time, a little louder, still with that good humor of his, he put his hand in a pocket inside his jacket. He played with it a little, unbuttoning it with his other hand. As he unbuttoned it, he bounced it two or three times against his chest, pulling her up with the pads of his fingers by the lapels, as if he were hot, he wanted to fan himself. The faggot looked at him, without saying anything.

«Namo, chase away the money», Tommaso said again, continuing to tap the hem of the jacket, a little harder, so as to show the part inside, on the chest covered by the gray shirt. But the faggot continued to be silent, frightened, looking ahead. Tommaso then took, put his hand inside the pocket of his jacket, shredded a little bit in the broken lining, and raised a closed switchblade, holding it in his fist: he carried it, still tight in his fist, between his thighs at the height of his belly, raising the right leg to provide shade.

The faggot looked at him out of the corner of his eye: Tommaso flicked the blade, and then sheathed it again: and so two or three times, as if for fun.

«Chat the money, come on!» she repeated, no longer laughing, twisting her mouth. The faggot stammered: «What? are you crazy? what are you doing?"

Tommaso flicked the blade once more, giving him an elbow that almost knocked him off his chair. But already the faggot was lowering himself, trembling all over, and he was starting to untie his shoe: he couldn't do it, however, because perhaps the knot was tight or his hands weren't needed. Finally he took the shoe off his foot without untying it, and emptied it so that Tommasino could see clearly: there were two hundred lire.

«Damn, you stink!» said a young man who was sitting right in front of them. Tommasino crushed the knife between his thighs. In fact, the young man turned towards the faggot: «Don't you wash your feet when you die? Damn you, what are you doing, he died? «To Purfina!» shouted another straggler next to the first, pinching his nose between his fingers.

Tommaso took the two plates and put them in his pocket too. "The other shoe," he said then. The fagot obeyed him, mumbling: "There's nothing to it." In fact, there was nothing in the other shoe. Tommasino put the knife back in his pocket, coughed a little, looked around, then got up and went straight towards the exit.

It was now night. A night in September, which fell suddenly because the season was starting to advance and it was getting dark earlier: but it was still summer enough for a kind of light to remain in the dark sky, in the sides of the houses, in certain little grey clouds that were stationed on the Janiculum.

Rivers of cars, wheelchairs and motorbikes packed along Corso Vittorio, spread through Largo Argentina, got lost towards Via Arenula, towards Piazza Venezia. The kids whistled, excited by that confusion, and above all by the thought that they would soon be away from work. In front of the newsstands, in front of the florists, outside the bars, there was such a dense passage of pedestrians that those who were in a hurry had to run down the street: those having fun were the young men who were almost always in groups, still dressed in their summer clothes. , with American trousers and striped or flowered t-shirts, and some, more shady, who lived nearby, even with only a white and very clean undershirt. Every girl who passed by was theirs: they leaned against each other, leaning together towards her, and began to say: «How beautiful you are! Sincerely good! Golden shit! My little girl! Angel of heaven! Damn, what a disgrace you have for Mari, can you even take him to church?"

Yet there was something in the air: something mysterious that it wasn't clear what it was. There was too much confusion, too much hubbub. Via Nazionale was a vermin, and at every traffic light the trolleybus stopped for half an hour: so it took some time to reach the fountain in Piazza Esedra, and the station. Further on, towards Via Morgagni, Piazza Bologna, the confusion continued, a little less, although the streets were crossed by long lines of cars: and under the wall of Via Morgagni, paved with gravestones with candles underneath, there it was even a procession, with many women kneeling and screaming for grace from the Madonna.

There were people again, and lots of them, at the terminus, under the Verano. A crowd of pedestrians who, having gotten off the trams coming from the centre, waited for full quarters of an hour, crowded together in a

dark space without shelters, between a kiosk and a little fiuttarolo shack, for the buses from the suburbs.

The walls of the cemetery rose up around it, with rows of reddish lights flickering above them: behind, like a large valley, the Tiburtina station opened up, with rows of buildings and skyscrapers in disorder all around it, as far as the horizon ended. , which disappeared swallowed up by the darkness and smoke.

There, where the view could reach, far away, one finally understood what it was that made the beautiful September evening strange and restless: it was a storm, bottled up there in a corner of the sky, at the end of the last rows of lit windows that shone faintly , far away, behind Piazza Bologna, on Salaria. Large clouds behind, curled and darker than the moonless sky, were piled up one on top of the other, compressed down there, scattering around a few shocks of thunder and a few breathless flashes of lightning.

At seven Tommaso woke up. Partly because he was used to it, since he was working now, partly because he wanted to put on the new suit too much.

He threw away the rags and sat down on the bed. «Ma», she shouted, with phlegm in her throat, «get some water ready for me to bathe in!» But no one there answered him anything. «Damn death!» he said in a low voice, coughing. He went to open the half-broken shutters, and as he pulled them up, he stood frozen and watched. “But the damn thing about him,” he shouted at the sky, which was all white, low, ice.

«But damn them!» she repeated, her face twisted with anger. From the window of his house, which was right under the beds, you could see a large piece of the panorama. Down there, the new village ended, with Via dei Crispolti, against the edges cut evenly into the tuff by the excavator, like slices of cake, and against the church, which was now almost finished.

Everything was dark, as if instead of seven in the morning it was seven in the evening. A dark one, a little white and almost dazzling here and there. The sky still squeezed out a little rain, at times: and the roofs, the fields, the streets, everything was soaked. Only on the opposite side, which Tommasino could not see, but which he imagined, was there a little light, white and milky too. "To ma," Tommaso shouted, "to ma!" But nothing. He went there in his undershirt and underwear as he was. The kitchenette was empty, but female voices could be heard from outside. The front door was open on the landing, and the dog was coming from there. Tommaso's

underwear were almost yellow with dirt: and his feet were dirty too, all full of stains and black lines. He stayed inside the kitchen, and called out: «To Ma! » The mother raised her head from the front door jamb and said: "What about you?" «Prepare some water for me to bathe in!» Tommaso said angrily. «Let me go, go», said the mother to the neighbor, «I greet you, Sister Ro'!» «I greet you, Sister Maria, if we see!» said the other, who was a tied-up balloon that always smelled of heartbreaking cod.

«If we see er ca...!» said Tommasino, in a low voice. Her mother entered the kitchen, took the flashlight and placed it under the cord. Tommasino was all cold. «Damn, oh, what a little girl! What, is it winter again?" he said, quickly going over to put on his trousers and shirt from the day before. «Damn you about this rain! » he made it loud again, black, because he was sick of deflowering the new blouse like that.

"What, didn't you hear last night?" she made him from the kitchen she mother of her. "Did you hear that?" he said hastily. «Er storm!» said his mother. "I was asleep," Tommaso said, shrugging his shoulders. «Damn, didn't you hear the noise? One fell here, at Ponte Mammolo! It seemed to me at the end of the world, it seemed to me!» She was very happy with the news. «But», she continued, «didn't you hear that Sister Rosa came to our house, that she was afraid of us? She was here for more than an hour, with me and with your father! Even coffee, if we're up for it!» "You did well," Tommaso said, picking up the seat, busy putting on the pedals that he had been wearing for a fortnight. "I've never seen a storm like it in my life," her mother continued from there.

«What, is the water ready?» cut Tommaso. «What, are you crazy? I just put it on fire!" «That's really hot, do you want to make it for me?» «No, cold! With this cold weather, you'll feel the pinch of pneumonia, and this time you'll feel it, I don't know what's wrong with you, I know!" Sister Maria said aggressively.

«Ah, but then you can wait an hour, here!» "What's wrong with you?" «I'm sorry, my dear!» Tommaso said fiercely. He went into the kitchen and took a look at the pile, cleared of ice water. «If and when you rent!» he said in a voice made even nastier by its hoarseness. He returned to the bedroom, opened the drawer of the old, torn dresser, and took off the new dress. It was black, with white stripes, prison style. «Damn, how strong he is!» said Tommaso, red with satisfaction.

Then his brother, who was sleeping in a bunk next to him, woke up: he too went to take a sullen look at the weather, without saying a word, and immediately put on the trousers of his good suit. He went into the kitchen barefoot. "What time, see you?" he too said in a voice thick with phlegm. "It's almost eight," said her mother, who had started to dry the beans on the worm-eaten kitchen table. She was beginning to lighten a little, since the inert roof of clouds was more shimmering, and here and there she was becoming chapped. After a while Tommasino's father also got up and went straight to the toilet, where he stayed at least half an hour every morning. "Damn him!" Tommaso said, running towards the toilet. «Make me pija the footbath, daddy!» he said. The father coughed and let him pass, and Tommaso removed the footbath from the gray wall, with its crusty plaster, which hung alone on a nail. The father, coughing and spewing like a scoundrel, locked himself inside. Tommaso took the footbath into the kitchen. «How's the water, damn it!» he said, putting a finger into the pile. The brother was warming up his milk. Tommasino, quite satisfied, feeling that the water was a little warm, took the casserole from under the cupboard. "It's freezing, again!" said Sister Maria, who was sitting and peeling the beans between her legs, next to her stove. They could barely fit in the kitchen, and when they got upset they would hit each other or hurt their feet. «Aòh, a ma'», said Tommaso, «heh!» Busily he moved the table, took a chair and placed it on the sink, and on the sink he placed the basin.

At that moment a ray of sunshine entered through the window, illuminating the kitchen with a beautiful clear light, for a while, immediately fading away. Tommaso's good mood increased at that first announcement of the return of good weather. He went back to the room, slowly undressed, throwing away the dirty clothes. "Now let's have a bath", he thought, "and after a lifetime!" From the work jacket that was hanging on the back of a broken chair, he took the wallet with the card, the two or three cigarettes that were left in it, the yellow-red ballpoint pen, and finally the five well-ironed blocks. He put everything on the bedside table, and, in his underwear, returned to the kitchen. Here her mother finished peeling the beans, with the husks all scattered on the ground, and her brother was eating the *caffè latte*, almost dry from all the bread that was inside her.

Tommaso pulled the footbath under the chair prepared next to the sink, and then poured the water from the pile, a little into the footbath, a little into the bowl. He sat down on the chair, with his tattered scraps inside the

footbath, where he washed himself from the stomach down, wearing his underwear. From the belly up, however, he washed himself in the basin, inside the bucket. When he had finished, and he had also dried himself, a beautiful, clear, fresh light filtered into the kitchen from the window, which looked like a golden drizzle.

The sky had almost completely cleared. It had transformed into a sea of light. Around this sea, like strips of sand, there remained clouds all curled and shrunken, full of white light.

Those who were under Tommaso's apartment, the Spadaccini, turned on the radio, which started full blast with the Comparcita. From other open windows, around, the voices of girls who were doing the housework or getting dressed were singing the music played by the radio, each on their own, while, from below the street, around the fountain, came the screams of the kids.

While he was also whistling the Comparcita, Tommaso went back to his room to get dressed. It took him almost an hour. But it was still early: and the radio, moving from Comparcita to Sera 'e Maggio, from Sera 'e Maggio to Maruzzella, kept him happy company. The longest and most complicated job was to comb his hair: still singing behind the radio, he went into the kitchen, still in his underwear, the clean ones, and wet his hair like a little duck: then he put a clot tightly around his head, so that it would take fold. After two or three minutes he took it off, and combing his hair with the toothless comb he kept in his pocket, he looked at himself in the glass of the kitchen window. But behind him, on the cucuzza, his hair stood straighter than before, while in front of him, all soaked, it fell onto his forehead. «Damn him!» he said between his teeth, and immediately started whistling again:

When he says yes, keep in mind that you don't have to suffer for your lover's heart...

he re-wet his hair and tied the dirty towel he had used to dry his feet around it. Like this two or three times. In the intervals he sat wildly on the wet chair, whistling or singing. In the end, his hair seemed to fit him quite as God intended: as fray as it was, it showed off the shape of his big head, plump and round like that of hound dogs, with a narrow neck and ears stuck to the reddish bumps behind the temples.

But Tommaso was satisfied, and shouted loudly, so that his voice could go beyond the wall: «Apa, and hurry up!», and waiting for his father to hurry up, he started singing again. In fact, after a while you could hear the water draining into the cup, and the father came out. Tommaso ran to occupy the place, and, spreading his legs because the mirror was too low, began to work with the comb around the parting, redoing it about twenty times, and folding his hair back, in the way he knew how. He stayed there for a long time, then, finally, he became embittered.

Outside there was a blinding sun. But Via dei Crispolti was almost empty. Two or three little pipettes who perhaps only knew how to say mother were playing their games on the sidewalk in the middle. From the two or three crooked houses of the Fairy Village that were there on the right, a whole buzz of female chatter came out. But, underneath, no one.

Despite the fact that every morning, especially on Sundays, there were at least thirty kids playing a little match or playing soccer on some wall: and just as many young people of Tommaso's age arguing or teasing each other on the stairs and in the courtyards.

"I don't know!" Tommaso, who was really counting on it, was disappointed by the appearance of him so all dressed up in his new suit among the neighbors.

In fact, he had already taken on a calm and rested air, like someone who has his own business to do, but still has a little time to stop and have a chat, without too much commitment, thus, out of general sympathy towards everyone.

Of course, he was impeccable: the sun glinted on his black suit, gilding the heavy fabric, with the movements of his calm and controlled step, or with the gestures of the hand that calmly brought the cigarette to his mouth. At the bottom of the white stripes of his trousers were his beautiful pointed shoes, which he had already worn a few months ago, but which were still sturdy.

Step by step he went down Via Luigi Cesana, the central street of INA Case, where there were only women, and some young men, if there were any, passed by on a motorcycle with the exhaust pipe open. The church bell rang desperately.

"I don't know!" Tommaso repeated to himself, with a grimace, seeing all that death.

He went into the tobacconist to buy the nationals, despite the fact that he still had three or four in his pocket. Even there there were only a few elderly men, with baggy trousers. Tommasino, increasingly intrigued, took it, paid and rose again.

In front of the barber, which was next to the tobacconist, because at INA Case all the shops were crowded together in a kind of one-storey bazaar in the center of the village, the same. None of those he hung out with: just older people, or someone he knew by sight.

He went further down Via Luigi Cesana which was a bit downhill towards Tiburtina, trying to understand something. On the right, at the steepest point, there were houses one next to the other, in a stairway, so that the first floor of the second was at the same height as the second floor of the first, and so on: in front of the colored facades, there were many external stairs that connected them, with landings that acted as terraces at the entrance doors, all bars and gratings.

Inside one of those sorts of cages, there was Scintillone, someone that Tommaso knew. «Thank goodness, let's hear what he says to me!» Tommaso said to himself. This Scintillone was in his undershirt in his belvedere, while the women screamed inside, contemplating the two little streets lined with barracks, slammed in the sun against the bare lawns.

«To Martian!» Tommaso asked him as he passed under one of the railings. Scintillone remained silent. Tommaso stopped at his feet, indifferent, and completely shuffled inside the flaming clothes.

«Aòh», he said to him, «you know where the others are, Francolicchio, Ruggeretto, Ugo Carboni...»

Scintillone looked at him, baked by the sun like a ciriola freshly taken out of the oven: he lowered his black eyes on him, stared at him thoughtfully for a moment, with his protruding ears still behind his forehead, with his short black hair stuck together, blue since they were black. Then he lazily began to plc plc with his tongue against the roof of his mouth, so lazily that it seemed as if his tongue would be stuck there. Finally he got up, yawning like a tiger, and left without answering, towards the little corridor between the railings at the end of the terrace.

"Sleep!" Tommaso asked him bitterly, resuming his journey. «Damn them!» he chewed between his teeth. "What, is everyone dead?" he then said, almost aloud, angrily.

Red in the face and slinky inside his blouse, he made the last stretch of Via Cesana and turned onto Tiburtina.

With him came down from INA Case a group of young men he didn't know. They were those idiots who were half daddy's boys, students with bald heads and pipparoli faces, who wanted to be mischievous. Like him, they were all excitedly going towards Tiburtina. Tommasino didn't even look at them, walking next to them, calm and hard. But inside him he was dying to ask what was the matter.

Other children and young men emerged from the Pietralata road, further down, under the Pecoraro mountain which lay naked like a garbage dump in the sun.

Everyone was going down in groups towards Tiburtino, but without haste. A gang of these walked right in front of Tommaso, on the raised sidewalk, at the foot of Monte del Pecoraro. «Let's see these guys, they know something, these little guys!» thought Thomas. He looked at them to see if he knew them: but they were all unfamiliar faces. Some faces like paragulets still suckling, but already foxy like young men. They were all lined up, with colorful blouses, American trousers full of pockets and buttons on the butt and dick, kept a little wild, without a belt, with certain exhausted waists like ballerinas.

They walked in packs. «Prosperello got the ball!» someone with a blonde face like oil shouted indignantly. «Who Prosperello?» shouted another with a tuft on his forehead along a palmella. «That beautiful ass!» replied the first, while his face split in two from the satisfied smile. «Wait for me, wait for me!» meanwhile someone completely unbolted shouted behind them. He came running. "Come on," one of the gang snapped at him. He was the little brother of two that Tommaso knew, Francolicchio and Ruggeretto. «Aòh», Tommaso said to him, «where are Francolicchio and Ruggeretto?» «And what do I know!» the little boy said, sputtering, such was the conviction with which he had said those words, and without even looking Tommaso in the face he blended in with the others.

«Fuck...!» Tommaso said between his teeth, partly because he wasn't comfortable asking for specific information, out of shame, and partly because he didn't deign to do so, with those little nuisances there.

In short, everyone went down towards Tiburtino, alone or in groups, under the sun.

But now Tommaso was in sight of the Bar Duemila, which was there, right at the beginning of Tiburtino, in front of Monte del Pecoraro. He quickly finished smoking the mozza, put both hands in his pockets, and quickened his pace.

In front of the coffin everything was full of red motorcycles, with a crowd of young people joking or arguing under the pergola.

They were sitting at small metal tables, or grouped together standing half inside and half outside the coffin, in confidence: but they were few, compared to usual.

"Do you pay for the coffee?" she said as she saw him huddled in a dented chair, holding his legs long and his hands on his belly. Tommaso smiled briefly, while his face wrinkled and filled with red spots. Without answering he stepped in.

«Aòh, I tell you, you know!» he insisted on the other, making it clear with a grimace that he wasn't joking at all.

«Whatever, Ruggeretto», said Tommaso in a sweet, deep voice, «don't worry about this...!» «A pariah!» continued Ruggeretto, his face already flattened, forgetting the expression of disgust of a moment before, «who, don't even have five scudi to offer a friend a coffee? But how? Is this how you introduce yourself?»

But already he couldn't even listen to what he was saying.

"Uaaaaaah," he said, stretching with his arms raised, like a dog. He squirmed a little for a few moments on the chair, with his belly up. As soon as he finished stretching and yawning, he stood up like a slut, pulled his black sweater down a little over his red blouse, lazily straightened his trousers over his grin, and went about his business.

The brother, Francolicchio, was playing with three other dirty men under the pergola. Tommaso approached him, calm, focusing his eyes on the papers, all malleable. He clapped Francolicchio on the shoulder and said: "I salute you, a cumpà!"

Francolicchio gave him a quick look like a blow from his belt: his face was all wrinkled because he had the stub stuck to his lips. "What do you want?" he shut up and started playing again, black as a snake. Tommaso behind him, full of good humor, peaceful, burst into song:

When you say yes, keep it in mind that you don't have to make your loving heart suffer...

It was all suggestive and ironic, and another of those playing, who didn't know him, looked at him and remained silent.

Tommaso lazily moved among the small group of those who with their butts on the edge of the next table were watching the game. Ugo Carboni and others from Jerusalem were more distant. They were talking, it seemed, about something very interesting, under the wet leaves of the pergola, through which bubbles of sun were filtering. Tommaso approached us, indifferent. Ugo Carboni, who was another of INA Case's new friends, enlightened him, toning down the conversation. «Kill, how fast you are!» he said, blushing a little under the roots of his pale hair. At least one, a bit properly! «Hey!» Tommaso said ironically, "I know the power, I know!" Ugo looked at him for a moment longer, complacent, with a grimace on his face, as if to say: "You're right, you're right!", then, with the others, he moved a little towards the grating, to continue the conversation. their discussion.

Tommaso remained all alone in the middle of the pergola.

He put his hands in his pockets, gave a half yawn, and went to sit down on a chair that, along with one of his companions, had been left wandering around in the middle. He stretched out, put his legs one on top of the other, and with his head thrown back, a little uncomfortable, really, because the backrest was low, he began to sing with a mocking air:

When he says yes keep it in mind you don't have to suffer there lover heart.

You told me yes in the evening and in May, and now have the courage to leave me...

As he sang more and more passionately, forgetting that he was doing it out of directness, his little brown eye turned here and there, especially towards the group of those who were playing and those who were watching, chewing the gum they had been grinding for an hour. Among these was Alberto, that is, that accountant who was a friend of Tommaso since the time he was with the MSI. After having sneered at him, Tommaso adjusted himself even more in his chair, as if he intended to sleep there, crossed his hands on his stomach, and continued to sing even more beautifully.

But he stopped suddenly, and with his eyelids lowered like a priest confessing, all red with pleasure, he said: "To Arbè!"

Hearing his name called, this Alberto who seemed like Alberto Sordi, looked around innocently.

He was the usual big ox, all bundled up, because it was Sunday, with a nice gray vicuña blouse, suede shoes and a yellow t-shirt underneath, a little open so you could see the dirty hair on his pectorals.

As Thomas alighted he raised his arm and said:

"Oh, Tomà!"

Meanwhile Tommaso was yawning with his forehead furrowing a little, out of laziness and well-being. He only raised one arm, as if he were out of breath to say hello.

The other stood up and came to his side.

«Plenty, how fast you are!» she said.

He remained silent for a while, competently observing how Tommaso was dressed. Tommaso remained silent, with a mocking air, to be observed.

Then, first the right-handed one, then the left-handed one, he tiredly removed his legs from the little gray chair in front of him, and stretching his beard towards it, he muttered:

«And sit down!»

«Aòh, Tomà», said the other, «why don't we go for a ride on a Vespa instead? And what are we doing here?"

«Let's go!" Tommaso said lazily.

«Let's go and see the river!» said Alberto, already at the bell to get around.

Tommaso pretended to know what it was about seeing this river, and got up. But before getting up, at that proposal, happy, he sat there for a little longer, as if he had to gather his strength; then, suddenly, he stood up, all Rudi in his shiny new suit. «Let's go!» he said again. He stretched once more, and very slowly, he went out with Alberto, leaving those other idiots to arm the usual coaxing.

Tommaso and Alberto were the most attentive people there, at the Bar Duemila. They could afford to be mischievous with a certain lightness, although without going too far. Everyone calm and distracted went out and got on the Vespa, Alberto in front, Tommaso in the back. Alberto kicked seven-eight times, with his heel, on that slut's pussy from the start-up, and Tommaso meanwhile sat down, with an indifferent air, looking around. And

he didn't change his expression even when the Vespa took off: she calmly kept her hands clasped behind her back, as if she had her hands on.

On the left, Monte del Pecoraro, on the right, the Tiburtino lots at the end of the square, with the bell ringing like an unfortunate woman, disappeared behind. Via delle Messi d'Oro disappeared, with the tavern, the row of wild oleanders along the edge, with the whole procession of people and the troops of children and young men, who, here and there, always went in the same direction, to the Tiburtina; the Silver Cinema disappeared and the dirty soap factory just built nearby disappeared.

The Aniene arrived in Tiburtino coming down from the Castles: once there, it passed under an old brick bridge, where there was a dredge and an ancient inn, a catacomb. Then he passed a few decrepit, filthy vegetable gardens, full of all the good things of God, on one side, and on the other, towards the Tiburtino lots, a whole piece of countryside with canes and pieces of badly cut wheat. . It then passed under the varecchina factory, a jumble of tanks, galleries, and Martian terraces, which purged a white stream of acids onto the current: it entered the arch of the bridge over the Tiburtina, disappeared under a tunnel of reeds, and went away down, towards Montesacro, to throw himself into the Tiber.

That whole piece of plain, that Sunday, was transformed into a sea.

As far as the eye could reach, on one side towards the Tivoli mountains, on the other nearby, towards Tiburtino, there was nothing but water.

Tiburtino stood like a port, with its identical rows of lots, like warehouses, which had a white façade illuminated by the sun, and the other in the shade, black.

There was no longer any distinction between fields, meadows, embankments, roads and paths. Deep down, the small gasometer and the forest of headlights and reflectors of the power station looked like many anchored ships.

The mass of water pushed down, yellow and dense, with boils twisting, up against the bank of the Tiburtina, foaming: there it stopped, angry, recoiled, channeled once again onto the usual bed of the river , and piling up in livid waves, it passed like a fury under the bridge: from there it widened once again into the countryside: and the four or five hamlets were there in the middle like so many Noah's arks.

Over all that expanse of water, the sun beat down, painting gold on one side of the thousands and thousands of waves, of ripples, all yellow, and

illuminating the black trunks, the weeds, the crates, the filth, the stains of 'oil that floated on that entire horizon of bullish water.

So the Tiburtina was like a pier, completely full of people who had come to enjoy the spectacle of the flood: it seemed like the night of the sgrullata.

Then the 311 arrived, headed for Rebibbia: it marched slowly, among the bottled up people, and as it reached the end, at the height of the bridge, it stopped.

Alberto and Tommaso, on their Vespa, with the others who were motorized, went after him to see what was happening. Down there, in fact, about fifty meters from the bridge, even the road was now flooded. The people on the bus, those who got off and those who remained on top, stretching their necks out the windows. Then two or three young men from Ponte Mammolo, all puffed up, took off their shoes and pedals, twisted their trousers up their calves, pirate style, and, raising their hackles to be seen, began to wade, laughing and joking, across the piece of flooded road. As soon as they were on the bridge, they began to run barefoot, all cheerful, towards Via Casal dei Pazzi, home.

However, those who had remained here, elderly men, women, clerks, were biting their elbows, out of impatience and anger: the delivery boy was bustling about with his hands on his stomach in his little chair and whistling.

Alberto, Tommaso and all around a mess of boys and young men, stayed there for more than an hour to eat the whole operation ass and soaking: another car had come from Montesacro, from the other side of the bridge, why not it had to be trusted to pass it: and the people, transported from there in one way or another, all glued together, took that. On the Tiburtina, there, in the middle of the sea, there was more traffic and traffic jams than during rush hours in Rome.

The only bell in the surrounding area was the small one of Tiburtino. When it started making a fuss to announce midday, the sun was no longer there.

The clouds that had compressed and huddled at the bottom of the sky had begun to swell again: white as cream, they had slipped up there, high up, they had gathered together again, detached themselves, gathered together again, light as if they were brides in wedding dresses, or dark and flayed like piles of rubbish shaken by the giannetta. They had ended up re-

blocking the whole sky, one above, one below, one small, one large, one grey, one dark, one white, and all smeared, dirty, icy. In a piece of sky the sun continued to shine, which was now done, it seemed forgotten by Christ, because a smoke that was not fog and was not clouds, ran under that crust that covered the sky, in waves, black as the soul . Then a part of all that pile of clouds, little clouds, smoke, became all the same grey, on the Rome side. It was the color of the earth, and like unruly earth it stretched out over the city: from there came the first thunder that rumbled right into the bones.

By now the sea on which Tiburtino stood, and stretched all around over the countryside, was black in color: it was only possible to distinguish that it was water by the confused shimmer of the crepes.

A storm came down like the previous night, with lightning and hail. The people just had time to run home under the first drops, in a darkness that seemed like night.

Around one, one thirty, it stopped a little, but it still continued to rain heavily.

After he had had lunch, Tommasino went back down to the café downstairs, all set and tied as before, and got busy arranging the afternoon's movement.

He went to the cashier and confidently asked for a token; with the token between his fingers, he had a chat with the owner, who was an old communist, one from Sacrofano, who had also been in the prison during Mussolini's time, then slowly they went to the telephone, he dialed the number, and turned towards the freshly whitewashed wall waited. He waited a long time, because he had telephoned the family who lived downstairs, and Irene had to be called from one little window to another, she had to put on something and come down the stairs. When she said: "Bronto!", Tommaso turned towards the inside of the coffin, leaned with one shoulder against the wall, crossed his legs, and said: "A Irè, I'm Tommaso!" Then smiling red as if Irene were there, he immediately got into the conversation, which was the conversation of the day:

"Or do you see what the weather is like?" she said.

Even Irene on the other side, we see, had her say on the weather, communicating some news about some lightning strike. "Kill!" Tommaso said, like a great gentleman, and then: «Did you see the cancellation? Just today when I wanted to bring you into Rome, look what happens!" Now he was bitter, sincerely annoyed: and as, you can see, Irene tried a few words

on the other side, minimizing the fact of the weather, Tommaso replied, immediately pointed to the point: «Can't you see what a flood it's making? Shall we go with this water, to Irene?", and immediately, suddenly: "But it's raining, it's raining! But here it rains for three days straight, it rains!»

He listened for a while, then almost singing in a low voice: "I don't have an umbrella, Irene, you know I miss it!" Maybe Irene should have said: «Then I'll do it for you when your birthday is», and in fact Tommaso replied, leaning his elbow against the wall with a snap: «Well, thanks for the compliment!» Then we see that Irene told something about birthdays and gifts, about a person, and Tommaso began to listen, his face becoming increasingly redder and his smile thinner, saying «Mh» «Eh» «If, self!" «Who, that person?» At the end he laughed affably and softly.

He spoke in an ever lower voice, which was almost a breath, with his mouth saying one thing, and his eyes moving around, lively, on their own. In the end, returning to the topic of the episode, she concluded: «Well, I'm staying at the bar with friends. I'll play a little game and then I'll go to bed!" And he immediately added quickly, in an almost loud voice, detaching his elbow from the wall and holding the device as if it were one of those trumpets that pages in castles blow: «Tomorrow yes! Tomorrow the weather is nice I'll come!" Finally he crouched down, leaning over the device held low, in the bell for greetings. «So bye, bye Irè, we are agreed, let's see tomorrow!» And with one last breath, satisfied and now red as a pepper, he said again: «Hello!» and he hung up the phone.

Having done this, he went back in front of the register, crouching his double breast, with a cough, and went to stop against the glass of the door, looking out. He stood there, satisfied, with his thumb absentmindedly stuck between the buttons of his codpiece, watching the sky. It had cleared up a little, and by now it was about to rain.

That Sunday at the Boston they were showing "There is a path in the sky", and therefore it was a moral duty to go and see it. At INA Case, everyone who hadn't been there the night before was preparing to go now.

In fact, some groups of people began to pass along Via Luigi Cesana, under umbrellas, or with raincoats on their heads, running, laughing and shouting. While he was waiting for it to rain, Tommaso proposed to the owner of the little bar that they should play a game of cards, without any money: «Sor maè», he said, «what if we get involved? For friendship, though." The old man stayed there, and they began to play standing on the

free piece of marble on the box. Having made a hand, they warmed up and had a cup of coffee. Tommaso played, won, drank coffee with his nephew, and when they had finished it was actually raining.

Tommaso stuck his nose out, saw that only a few drops were still swirling in the dark air, without going back he shouted: «If we say goodbye, a sor maè!», and slipped out onto the street.

He pulled up the collar of his rasp, and with his hands in his pockets he headed towards the Boston. On the Tiburtina, with the trees shaken against the sky that looked like a stormy sea, among the confusion of the Bersaglieri and the people waiting for the bus, taking advantage of that moment when it wasn't raining, you could hear Claudio Villa singing at the top of his voice, on the microphone of the cinema. The wet air, the low clouds, the Monte del Pecoraro, the four little buildings among the hovels, were thundered by that voice that sang loudly and drummed. Tommaso, cheerful, began to sing after him, while he walked along Via di Pietralata, among the rows of others, towards the cinema. He entered humming into the Boston, which was so full you couldn't tell, and it felt like entering a daylight, with that stench of wet clothes, dirty feet and sweat that was there. The kids were screaming in the front rows, even sitting on the floor, among the streaks of piss that ran down under the chairs, between the shells of the bruscolini, up to the tarpaulin.

So he slipped into the middle of the crowd, along the stripped wall. She got busy right away, in the midst of that pile of rubbish that was there, with the boys and the mothers, perhaps. He arrived behind a small column, and nearby, at a movement in the crowd, Tommaso immediately spotted a horse's tail that was hobbling here and there. It must have belonged to a little girl, from the way her hair was done, and because she was short.

"Let's see!" thought Tommaso, and he did his best to appease him.

He crawled through the crowd, with the wives kissing, enraged. There, behind the column, it was a little wider, because you couldn't see and the people, pulling their necks, stood here and there. Tommaso adapted to it, content to see only a piece of tarpaulin, and began the movement, with his feet and hands, to begin working on the beast. This one was really first-rate. "Oh my god," thought Tommaso, "I'm a monster, am I?": But he wasn't laughing at all, even though he was making this outburst inside himself.

So a quarter of an hour passed, and already, come on, Tommaso had almost reached the point of placing his thigh against that of the little girl:

but then the lights came on, and inside the room there was all the usual hubbub.

Some shouted, some sang, some called the bruscolinaro, and everywhere you could see people climbing over the backs of chairs.

Tommaso tried not to lose his position: but there it was like being in a stormy sea. To appear indifferent, he took and, taking one hand at a time out of the crowd, lit a straw; but, turning his eyes, huddled against the column, on the opposite side of him, he saw a person who, at first, he did not recognize, and who then, as he had cornered her, had to enlighten her very well to understand it.

It was the Zimmìo: but apart from the fact that in those months he had grown bigger and more swollen, he now appeared so complete that everything seemed to be outside of him. On his head he had one of those gray hats, with a round crown and a slightly wide, hard brim, with a white edge around it, as Milanese businessmen use: it was brand new, and it still sat on his head. For a bet, placed there as if at random, although it almost reached his eyebrows, covering half the pedicels of his forehead. As serious as it was, that hat gave Zimmìo's face an even more parochial expression. He then had a nice white shirt, with a dark bow tie, blue with light dots: he was wearing a light, gray overcoat, made of the best wool, with slightly narrow shoulders, very fashionable, English-style, and underneath it you could see the dark suit, almost black, with a row of white buttons, and, further down, the waistcoat of the same fabric. He had a leather glove on his left hand, which also held the other glove: with his right hand he was smoking a gag stuck in a long amber holder.

So, all gentlemanly, he stood leaning on the column. «To Zimmì!» called Tommaso. Zimmìo looked at him and raised his head a little in greeting, laughing a little through his moustache.

Tommaso held out his hand, and the other one too, and they shook their fingers, as if they had covered them in glue, all courteous. «Eeeeeeh», sighed Tommaso, stretching, «damn damn!» Zimmìo looked at him with a laugh on his face. "Well, what are you doing, handsome?" Tommaso inquired affably.

"What foo?" replied Zimmìo, «I'll break the cu... of those little sparrows!»

«Eh», Tommaso sighed again, looking at him as he listened, «you're deaf!»

"Self!" said Zimmìo, pointing his index finger, like a knife, against his throat, «I'm sorry! Slaughtered! 'N white as 'na turnip!»

«But fuck...!» said Tommaso, incredulous.

“Do you have half a loan bag?” Zimmìo fired unpunished.

Tommaso looked at him cheerfully, thoughtfully: "Damn," he said, "what a pussy you are!"

«Mom I'm so happy!» Zimmìo sang.

So the lights went out and the film started again, amidst the last screams and whistles of the crowd.

As they left Boston, Tommaso thought he would find everything dark, which at that time was usually night. Instead there was still light. It wasn't clear where it came from, perhaps the world had turned upside down and above you could see the hole of hell, from where the flames came down. It was all black around, but, in the middle, there was a sort of depression in the clouds, which gave off a bit of blue, and from there, like the walls of a well, the clouds were illuminated by an orange light. , which spread around. But a dark vapor was passing in front of all that illumination, a vapor that the sirocco was sending at full speed, and which was becoming thicker and thicker, and so low that it touched the tops of the six or seven new buildings in Pietralata, going towards the 'Aniene, towards the Prati Fiscali. Soon that black smoke became a real cloud, which filtered the light that fell like blood from the center of the sky, and dampened it, spreading it over Pietralata like the ash of death.

So in no time at all it got dark, and it was night. After a while it started raining again. Along Via di Pietralata you could see people hurrying back home, and others, at the end, illuminated by the light of the bar, waiting for the bus, under the warm winds of the sirocco.

Tommasino at a run, skipping over the quagmires, with his hands in his pockets and his collar pulled up, arrived at the bar with Zimmìo in his wake, who was running around talking about the dead, but to himself, with the same politeness with which he skipped over the quagmires, so as not to dirty himself. .

The bar was completely full, with smoke and a choking smell of dirty, wet clothes.

They were all there, more or less, Lello, Zucabbo, Cazzitini, the Jackal, the Zellerone, the Minchia, the Freghino, the Buddha, the Gricio,

Nazzareno, and blessed souls, who were piled up on the very wet floor, who playing cards or chatting.

Tommasino entered, and no one, as always, saw him.

But as soon as Zimmìo entered, first Buddha, then Minchia, then gradually all the others in the gang turned to look at him: they stood for a moment staring at him dumbfounded, then one after the other burst into laughter that they had to attack the tables so as not to fall to the ground, rolling and pissing himself. Zimmìo stood silently observing them with a priest's face, but with his eyes that made him laugh too, in front of the door: he stood there grimacing at them for a while, while they disemboweled themselves in front of him, freeing themselves like a group of madmen. : then slowly he unbuttoned the buttons of his coat one by one, opened it, thrust his belly forward, and catching himself underneath with his hand which was a hood, shouted: "Have a laugh about this!" Then he took it and at a quick pace, as if he were going to the square, he approached the counter and looked at the barista, with a very red face that was lost like fat in the fire, laughing under his moustache, and said: «A cappuccino, a morè !» And he glanced back, like an old fox. The others continued to go uàh uàh uàh: "What are you de la mala tonight?" the Jackal shouted at him. And Nazzareno: «What, did you give yourself a dirty look at Zimmì?» «A Zimmì, you're the coolest guy in the village!» Buddha asked him in his syphilitic voice.

Then little by little they calmed down, and those who were playing picket started the game again. Tommaso went to stand next to Lello, who was watching Buddha, Gricio, Nazzareno and Delli Fiorelli playing. He clapped his hand on the shoulder, saying: "How are you doing, cumpa?" "Okay," said Lello without turning around, "as you have to do!"

There were also old men and old men, drunk to the uterus. They stood in threes against the desk, there next to Zimmìo, and argued, shouting at the top of their lungs, with conversations that never ended, incoherently, beating their chests, and their eyes bulging out from under the stinging fur of their eyebrows.

At full speed, covered by thunder, three or four other customers, from Tiburtino, entered, and among them, Carletto with the guitar. They went inside, blowing and shaking off their wet clothes, stamping on the floor which was a quagmire. «Four punch ar rum!» they ordered the bartender in a hurry. They pressed themselves to the counter, Carletto took the heart

wrench off his back and placed it next to it. Two or three of those at the tables had turned, their faces on fire. «See», said Gricio, «let's go to Ghitara!» He got up, slowly approached the counter, as if his knees were bending from weakness, said to Carletto: «Permit me?», took the guitar, and began to send:

Strings of my guitar...

«But fuck..., to Gricioooo!» those who were at the table with him shouted to him. Hearing that Gricio was also singing another one, who was playing cards, he started singing, but not «Corde de la mia ghitarra», but «Solo pe' te»: then a third one joined in, and after a while six or seven sang, each on his own, some one song, some another. Gnaccia sang:

*Onda marinaaaa,
you are beautiful and enchanting more than a mermaid.*

The Buddha, who was already beginning to bald, but still had many light and transparent curls on his head, said: "How hungry!" Then he too started singing:

*Gate among the roses,
an angel smiled at me tonight...*

In the end Carletto picked up the guitar again, cleared his throat, made two chords, and gave everyone a moral slap in the face by singing that he was a God:

*How beautiful are you Nina from Trastevere, you who were born in the
shadow of the Cupolon...*

Gricio, who had started playing again, raised his eyes from his cards, looked around with the balls of his eyes shining with satisfaction, and said: «What is this about the song of the fasting people? What, is it hungry that makes you sing?»

He took a card from the pack he had in his hand and knocked it on the table, then raised his eyes, fixed Gnaccia with an old briar look, and did it

again:

«Aòh, but have you eaten tonight?»

«But this is something on the agenda!» Delli Fiorelli placed it down with the stump held between his lips, which blinded him. «And how great are these! At Easter!"

«But when do we eat!» she blurted out the Buddha, laughing joyfully.

The storm was roaring louder and louder outside.

"You will understand!" continued the Buddha, even more cheerfully. «In the middle here, if one of us challenges the fakir Burma, we will punish him!»

There was a face that didn't bother you at all to believe: not even Gricio, or Delli Fiorelli, or Nazzareno, or all the others, with those little bones inside their stretched skin that seemed to be thrown to stray dogs.

«Speaking of hunger», said the Buddha, with his eyes lowered to his papers, «do you remember this thing, in Cazziti, that day that we met you on the tram, that I was listening to Canticchia? Damn, that day we had twisted guts! You'll understand, and who remembered it for a long time that no longer ate it! Er Canticchia leaned on me, and I leaned on him, we looked like orphans!»

He laughed with his tongue between his lips like a plunger, squirting saliva, and continued:

«Well, then, like you, I repeat, we were hanging out there in Viale Liegi: Canticchia was scared,

but hunger, damn you, gave me the courage of a lion! If it would have been done, he would have cut off his arm that day!

«Then we arrived there where they drew blood: there were entire families in there: fathers, mothers, Fijians, Fijians, grandparents! Everyone's bleeding to death in there! It seemed to me that they were a slaughterhouse! I did it, ar He hums: "A Cantì, don't worry about it! Hold on for ten minutes, and soon we too will be on equal footing, happy, in Cantì! ”

«Ar Sing je tears make my eyes hungry: I couldn't look him in the face, you'll understand!, he made me cry too! It seemed like a smooth broth to me, when he spoke he blew... So, when did we give an identity card to those Fijians of a slut: they had taken X-rays to see if we were sick... You'll understand, if you saw all transparent: even the lonely vermin died there, from hunger! Long story short, in short, they'll sell us out! They put those

balls in our hands! Afterwards they let us go into a little room, they give us a small sandwich with oil, with a slice of salami and a small glass of marsala. We saw that mirage, and, you won't believe it, I felt light, light, I was flying, then I felt a strong heat in the hole in my ass: "A Canti, I've got rusty jaws and jaws!" "I do, and while I'm reaching for the sandwich, the effort screwed me over, and I fell on the floor!"

He looked fiercely at everyone around, putting a funnel-shaped hand over his mouth:

«I fell on the floor!» she repeated with her mouth drooling.

«Jesus called me to Heaven!» he added then laughing again. «I found myself in the hospital, with my head all bandaged up, and with a glass of milk in front of me, to feed me!»

Everyone laughed, shouting at him: «Fuck...!», then Cazzitini began to shout: «Listen to this piece!» because he also wanted to tell the story about himself, with his eyes already shining with laughter.

«I hadn't eaten for three days», he said, «I went into the shop, and I had a thousand lire in my pocket, and I ordered the double shop.

«But hunger got the better of me, and so I started ordering soups, I order one, I order two, I order three...»

He also put his hand like a funnel over his mouth, pulling his neck:

«I've reached thirty!» he shouted. «And after the thirtieth, I was ordered another soup, they brought me the empty pile with the sgummarello, and they said to me: "A more, you have eaten up all the workers' soups! You ruined two construction sites! "»

The friends had a laugh, but even Cazzitini hadn't finished speaking before the Jackal intervened: «This is a joke», he said, «I'm making you cry now! Listen, listen to this tragedy!

«One day I too», he said, looking around, «was so hungry that I couldn't make it up the sidewalk: I went to ring the bells in the church for half an hour, and so I got a good meal. ar Circolo de San Pietro. The damn thing about him, when he gave it to me, the priest looked like he was giving me a cheque! I go to the Circolo de San Pietro to run, for fear that it would end... In the midst of all these old men, old women... In the midst of all these drooling people... some had a can of petrol, some had a can, some had a conculina, some a hood, some a barrel of carbide... And one even had a hat, to put in the broth: "Give me a hat of pasta and beans," he would say. "Give me a soup cap! "»

«One gave me a little jar to put food in: I went to one side, sat in a little corner, I could eat well, oh, some fish well, some fish badly! Do you know what I found in the soup? A condom!»

«But fuck...!» they said around him, raising a mass of wax.

"Of course!" shouted the Jackal, "with those hucksters of cokes, they have little trouble with those porters over there, who carry the stuff! And then, you know, when the body of the crime disappeared, there it was! The safest place is in my jar! I'm a good mouth anyway!"

He laughed with his little boyish eyes shining:

«Aòh, pasta and condoms», he added, «what, you're crazy! but then you find a dish like this! Not even on the French Riviera, they'll give it to you! Damn you, how disgusting! »

«Aòh», said the purple Buddha, «but it's all rich: what have you done? Did you eat it or throw it away, the condom?"

«No, I got it into my head!» cried the Jackal, laughing.

«What, was it Carnival?» Cazzitini asked him again, laughing, while everyone burst out laughing.

But at that moment, zac, the lamps went out. It was all dark, and after a while only the embers of the blazes remained, and the shadows that stung and shouted.

Someone lit the cannon, and the bartender pulled two candles from under the bar and lit them, the flames glowing consumptively on the wet bar.

At that light, everyone went to the door to look outside: it was dark, but still it was clear that something had happened on the street, in the village. The lights went back on for a few moments: the road in front of the bar was a lake, there were at least two feet of water. And, in the other streets, the low ones, in the center of the village, you could see more water glistening, up to the small windows of the basements. The houses emerged directly from the water, in the reflection of the four lamps: and already the old stuff, the stakes, the rags, the rubbish from the courtyards was starting to float. Every now and then the light of lightning, followed by a faint thunder, made the entire village visible, now entirely in the water. The lights dimmed again, and only the two candles continued to shine inside the coffin. Everyone was crowded at the door. «What, it's Venice, isn't it?» Cazzitini tried. «If, Venice is ca... It's our business now, I know!» the Jackal rambled.

The old men, drunk, soaked to hell, stood there reeling and banging their hands.

frantic voices incoherent words. One, in the confusion, had collapsed on the ground, on the water on the floor, and remained there, unable to get up, frantic.

Four or five young men took off their hats, rolled their hats up above their knees, and ran out: the others were watching them, but nothing could be seen; and, after a minute, they disappeared into the darkness, washing away in the slime.

Tommaso went to scurry about on one of the small empty chairs, piled up at the end of the room: and he squatted there, with his hands on his belly, with a peaceful air, as if he were preparing to calmly wait for the one who was supposed to come to come, and, if necessary, to spend the night there. He picked up a straw and began to spit, placidly.

At that moment there were lights dancing and making noise outside, under the cascades of rain.

They were getting closer. They were little men with blinds and rubber trench coats tangled up on their heads and shoulders. They opened it and started talking loudly.

After a while Tommaso also came closer to listen. But after shouting a few words, they immediately set off to go down the village.

You could see the white lights splashing here and there on the pieces of brown water. «Who was aòh who was she?» Tommaso then asked Lello. «Those of the party, there!» Lello slurred. "And what did they say?" «They're drowning to death down in Little Shanghai!» said Lello. "How did he drown?" "I do not know!" "There's a flood," said the Jackal. «Der river, what?» said Thomas. «No, this shit...!» "Asshole!" shouted Tommaso, who remembered that once, when he lived there, often, when it rained, the water came down from the mounds around the village. The river embankment was fifteen meters high, it was impossible that the river had leaked.

«Aòh what are we doing aòh», shouted Zucabbo. Tommaso was concentrated, with a gangrenous face, that he seemed to be under investigation: he was silent.

"What did they want?" he then asked Zucabbo. «May we fail too, help!»

"If tomorrow! At Easter!" said the Jackal.

«Assholes», said Tommaso, speaking disgustingly, looking at them in the face, «why, can't we do it if we can? What, are you afraid?"

«When I feel like taking a bath, I go to Ostia... And I even prefer the sandal!» said the Jackal.

Tommaso didn't even bother, he said: «Well, you're doing the Germans here! Just an inch from your ass, don't worry, eh?

The Jackal looked at him: «See, oh», he said curiously, «is that Tommaso?» and to the Buddha: «Do you recognize Thomas more than you?»

"What, you don't know him?" made the Buddha pasty. «And Saint Thomas, the saint of flood victims!»

But Tommaso was determined, very hot: "Then you don't give a damn about those wretched pores!" he shot. «You are not men of this world!»

The Jackal began to take some vinegar: «Aòh, yes, you feel sore», he said, «go ahead! and go! Who manages you?"

«I'm going, asshole!» Tommaso said more and more disgusted.

«What are you waiting for, put on your underwear!» said the Buddha, without even looking at him anymore.

Tommaso, caught at the weak point, with a mad sprint pushed aside those who were in front of the door: "Get up!" he said. But he had a new blouse. He stopped. "That? Were you hesitant?" said Nazzareno. «Fuck...!» Tommaso said dryly. He turned to the bartender. «To the barman», he said mischievously, «who, if I happen to have a bag, a bag to cover my head?»

Without saying anything the bartender bent down, munched under the counter and removed a bag, already all soaked. Tommaso took it, took off his jacket, gave it to the counterman to keep, as well as his shoes and pedals. He twisted his trousers, put the sack over his head and shoulders, and went out, climbing over the old drunk, who was still lying on the ground, reasoning and grinding his teeth in anger, like a dog.

«Come on, to Tomà, tomorrow you'll get a medaja!» said the Buddha from behind, as he came out under all that water.

It was worse than being blind. The water splashed in her eyes, dripped down her face: it was like inside a sewer. After taking two steps, Tommaso was already soaked to the bone. «But then I'm going, but what am I for?» he said to himself, stuck, half-witted under that deluge. After another two steps the water reached his shins, after another two it reached his calves, after four it reached his knee. But in the dark he began to look at us. He took a

right, along Via dei Monti di Pietralata. He made out in front, confused, the shape of the bus, stopped at the shelter, with water up to the running boards; voices could be heard further down; and in some windows in the flooded houses, the light of a candle could be seen.

Then he heard a siren scream: it screamed, screamed and always seemed to be stopped at one site. After a while, here were the high beams, illuminating the entire street, the entire village, which had become a lagoon, under the torrents of rain. It was the fire engine, which was coming along the street of Pietralata, at walking pace, with the siren screaming desperately. But she couldn't bear it anymore, and, at the point of the bus, she stopped. Perhaps he too was headed towards Little Shanghai. The dazzling headlights remained raised, and illuminated a whole section of streets and houses like daylight.

Right under the beam of light, a little further on, we heard an explosion, a collapse: it was a manhole cover that had blown, shattering a piece of pavement.

Tommaso pulled himself next to the fire engine: they were discussing, finding things to say, under that fury that covered everything. They didn't even know what to do. Maybe they didn't even know where those hovels on the river were. Of course, with the car, it was impossible to get there: you had to go there in slices.

«Let's go!» Tommaso then shouted, getting the hint, "I'll accompany you! I know the way!"

“What, is it far?” she asked him for a boss, a dark-haired guy with a rope twisted around him. «Not even a kilometre!» Tommaso shouted, half drowned. They took what they needed, and aimed the blinds. They walked for a while with water on their knees, passed the stretch illuminated by the high beams, and pushed themselves into the midst of that wrath of God.

The families who lived in the basements had gone up to the neighbors upstairs: they could all hear voices, cries of fear and children crying. Some older kids were out, with their legs in the water, watching. In some streets, a little downhill, the water flowed like a flood: stuff floated on top of it, boxes, stakes, pieces of wood, rubbish.

At the last houses the water was even higher, because it was the deepest point, between the mounds on one side and the fields on the river on the other.

We had to go slowly. In fact, right at the beginning of the slope of the road, immediately at the end of the village, a small sinkhole had formed: the firefighters crowded around and aimed their blinds: stuck up to the roof, in the hole, there was a station wagon, half rolled over. , on the burst sewer.

On the edge, they saw a shadow, which was tumbling forward: it was a small shadow, curled up, it looked like a dog or a little boy, under the showers of rain. Every now and then he would go down, long into the water, with his hands forward, get up, take a few steps and fall back down. At that moment he was right in front of a side road, downhill, from where the water rushed down like a stream. A band, rolled by the current, bouncing, hit him right on a bank, and he fell straight into the water. They pulled him up when he had half expired with the water that had dissolved the drool in his mouth, and the drool was foaming down, black with slime. "Who is he? Where is he?" the firefighters asked. «And er Muchetta! He lives here on lot nine!» said Thomas.

They glued it on, and took it towards the house: this had water up to the basement windows, and everyone who was there stood on the stairs, with a few candles in their hands. They threw the old man there, and continued towards Little Shanghai, with Tommaso in the lead.

After the last lot, the road went uphill and began to emerge from the water, until, after a hundred meters, it was dry. But there was half a meter of mud: it was almost worse to walk there than before: it took almost half an hour to get to the pile of shacks. But this, one can say, was no longer there. It took them a while to understand it, in the light of the blinds: but it was exactly like that.

On the starboard side, the river ran almost alongside the road, where there were usually ten meters or more of scapicollo.

On the left, towards the last hills above the road, where, around the small clearing, the hovels were in disorder, here and there, you could hardly see anything anymore. Only pieces of wood, pieces of walls, bands, entire but overturned roofs, boards, supports, long poles on the ground. And, everywhere, from the top of the hills, through the village, over the road, down to the river, an avalanche of mud and water slid down.

A few huts had remained upright only on the other side, on a higher point, around a cave: and a few on this side too, on the sides of that sort of river of slime that flowed down the slope.

Luckily the rain was letting up, and at certain moments it was almost no longer raining: we could see a little.

Tommaso, following the firefighters, climbed up, sinking into the mud, grasping at the remains of the bushes, at some branches, at some small trees, and they almost reached the highest part, halfway up the slope, where there was a sort of clearing. Some people had gathered there, having escaped from the barracks, dressed as they were, some even in shirts, with the creatures in their arms and the kids crying.

The women ran, slipping, black with mud, towards the firefighters: they were screaming, asking for help. "Here there is," they shouted, as if it were necessary, perhaps because they couldn't understand it. "Here's all we have left!"

There was nothing there before, four hovels, four rusty sheds, a few rags: and now all this had been smashed up, carried down by the mud towards the river. The open space in the center, where Tommasino played as a child, was a small lake, and in the middle, nestled in the water, were the remains of the huts.

Some of these huts, here and there, were half standing: but, on the mountain side, there was now so much mud that it had reached the window brackets, and had begun to go inside, breaking the two shutters. rotten. Then, from there, she broke down the front door and began to rise again, spitting out everything that was in the house, chairs, boxes, shoes, bowls, some broken-down tables. All this piled up in front, and little by little, playing on the flow of slime, it ended up towards the center of the little village, and, with the other debris larger than the completely demolished shacks, it went down towards the river.

All the inhabitants, or almost all, had gathered up there around that cave where some shacks were standing: only a few there were on this other side, on the road towards Pietralata.

A rush of rubbish, as big as arms, emerging from clogged burrows, had mixed up with the people on the dry land, and were prancing around on their shoes, with their long black fur smeared.

The current of the river made a loud noise, rushing by, smooth, full of boils, which seemed to make the earth around it tremble.

All waving, shouting, they were looking towards one point: and towards that point they were also looking towards Passalacqua, Di Nicola, Di Santo, and the other companions, soaked to the brim, who had been there for a

while, waiting for the sea from the sky, them too, because at a certain moment, when it came to the point, what did they do? There were no Christs or Madonnas there. Among the shacks that hadn't been demolished, there was one that was a little drier: it was the one everyone was looking at. A woman, who lived there, had nailed herself there, perhaps with the hope of saving some stuff: she had started to pick up everything that was on the ground, and that the mud had carried away, entering from the windows.

But then, little by little, the mud grew bigger and bigger, and she was left stuck there, alone, in her hut, calling for help.

His voice could hardly be heard at all, with the noise of the rain, the wind, the river current. The firefighters had ropes, and they were busy going to get her: Tommaso, fiercely, got in the way, making a whole mess, shouting to get her to be listened to: "You're not filthy", he shouted, "you don't know the bottom! It's all full of holes, there's a fence... Let me know, I know the way!"

But the firefighters didn't see him at all, all busy preparing the rope, under the blasts of the rain. One tied it to his hips and went inside. But he didn't even take two steps before he slipped, because there was a slope, and he got immersed up to his eyes. He tried to get up, but he wasn't having it, so the others took him back.

"I told you!" Tommaso shouted. «I told you that you don't make a big deal out of it! If you don't pass by there, you have to go around!»

«Damn this young man, here, who knows where he should put his feet!» Passalacqua then intervened.

"So what should I do?" Tommaso kept shouting, in the bell, excitedly, "Do I have to go, yes or no?"

"Come here," said the boss. He took and tied Tommaso around his waist. Without even looking back, to show him how it was done, Tommaso threw himself off the side of the road, and began to walk around the coast, instead of going straight to the hut. Even there the mud was high, above the shins, but skirting the shacks that had more or less survived, around the small square, little by little, as God wanted, he approached them. The woman screamed for help, stretching her neck from a small window in the shack.

«Now I'm arriving, a sign! Stay good!" Tommaso shouted from the swamp.

The best came now, in the center of the clearing, where the current of water and mud passing down from the mounds passed.

Tommaso threw himself into it, moving all his arms like a puppet, to walk, because he had gone under until the bellico, and the current, although it didn't seem like it, was strong and dragged it down towards the river, which rumbled a few steps away.

Diving in like a pig, wallowing in that mess, with gritted teeth, with his eyes bulging from fatigue, he arrived in front of the woman's hovel, on the other side.

The woman, dishevelled, frail, with her hands clasped tightly on her belly, was waiting for him: as soon as she was there, she had a chest attack, all at once. She began to toss and turn: «Give me something to eat», she shouted, «I arm myself with a mattress, a dress...»

«Good sir, but I'm not a porter!» Tommaso shouted at her rudely, while she said this and didn't move. «'Let's go! 'Come on, sir, the matter is getting worse here!'

"But I'm scared, what do we do?" she said she was the one bent forward, towards all that water, trembling, white, frozen, with her hair stuck to her cheeks like snakes.

«Come here, lean close to me, hold each other's necks!» Tommaso said to her, pulling her away. Meanwhile, she had recognized her. She was a slut, who hung out in Montesacro, on the Aniene bridge: the pimp was a friend of hers. "It would be funny," he thought, "if I were to drown myself because of this!"

"But you can't do it," the woman shouted, in a little girl's voice, making a whimper, "but can't you see what's wrong, damn you?"

«Let's try, aaa what!»

He glued it half to his shoulders: and it clung to him. As always, in all things, whether she was laughing, or getting angry, or being beaten, half of her was truly afraid, but half of it was as if she had nothing to do with it, only amazed by what happened to her.

«Be careful, there's the ditch there, it won't fit!» he recommended himself to Tommaso, while the latter wallowed in the deep mud, which he dragged away. He didn't care anymore, he was exhausted, half dead and wasn't falling over just out of desperation.

"And keep quiet," he shouted at her, "I know where I have to go!"

«Oh my God, are you doing it, are you doing it?» she moaned that one, trembling.

«And he's not going to bother you...!» Tommaso shouted at her, her hair caked in her face. «Aòh, what do you want, that I'll throw you on the ground? Yes, don't stop recommending yourself to Christ, I'll leave you here in the middle, fuck you...!» Holding on to the rope, he desperately pushed himself towards the slope, where they were waiting for him, and they pulled him slowly. All sweaty, almost dying to catch his breath, he arrived dry. The old lady began to act crazy and start convulsing, while the others tried to calm her down and give her a little cognac.

Tommaso untied the rope from his hips, sprawled on the mud, completely left behind, but hunchbacked, with a low forehead, because he didn't want anyone to see how he was in his face, without even a breath to curse.

Meanwhile, a fire engine had arrived from the other side, from Montesacro, and most of the people were from there: now it was a done deal, it was enough to take those four unfortunates who had remained on this side to Pietralata, and put them under a ceiling. They made a mess, because they had taken as much water as they wanted: the firemen and the others gathered together and took the women, the children, the most ill-off by the hand, while the rain began to come down in rivers again.

Two boys supported Tommaso, one aged three or four, and one aged six: the smaller one was carried by the cavaccio, the other by the hand.

They were two good, good kids, who who knows how much they had been through by now, and they had thoughtful faces like two old men. Carucci, they were cute: they looked alike, because they were brothers, with the half-curly black mop and the big black eyes: but their faces were pale and serious.

They walked in silence for a while, with their shoes sinking into the mud: then the bigger one raised his little face from the raised collar of his coat, old in pieces, but still elegant, and looked up at Tommaso.

"And now we don't have a house anymore!" she said. "When are they sending us?"

"Eh", said Tommaso, "no one has ever died in the cold, don't think about it!"

«Did Franco's house flood too?» the boy asked after studying it for a while.

"I don't know this Franco," answered Tommaso, "but he lives here, even his own, from home, he hasn't been saved, stay calm!"

"Don't squeeze my neck," he said to the smaller one, who was clinging to his back.

"We have low houses," the other continued, thinking about it, "those who have high houses don't have water!"

«Damn guys, don't squeeze my neck, I told you!» Tommaso shouted.

Little by little they arrived in Pietralata, with the windy rain breaking loose as if it had begun then. They took those from the barracks, for the moment, to the party headquarters, which was also half flooded. The people barely understood us, sitting on the benches, the women with the creatures in their arms: everyone was crying, they were in despair, while, outside, the peals of rain and thunder could be heard louder and louder.

«What, is this the end of the world?» thought Tommaso, looking at the scene that unfolded inside the party: someone who was sitting on a twisted mattress, with a little boy on his knees; one who squeezed the pedals, on a stool, drying his feet; a woman who was ill and crying, with those who consoled her next to her: «What the... are you crying? What do you think that if you cry the water goes away? It happened to you, it happened to everyone, you know!»: But she didn't even hear them, she was like she was going crazy; and, like her, many others, around there, who had lost everything they had, and were reduced naked like vermin. They had placed all the little boys in swaddling clothes on the table in the tavern, like a pile of kittens, there were at least thirty of them, one on top of the other, and all around their mothers who were watching them, shivering from the cold.

Three or four little boys, a little older, had pinched the flag somewhere, and, taking advantage of the fact that no one was looking at them, they were having fun with it, playing Indians.

«Aòh, guys, you're damned!» Tommaso shouted, seeing them. He went there and took the flag away from him, placing it back in his place, in the corner next to the desk. "What, are you staying at home?" he shouted at him again, pissed off. "Put it away!"

Nothing had happened: a village flooded by rain, some ruined shack, where there were people who, in their lives, had been through worse. But everyone was crying, they felt lost, murdered. Only in that red cream, all soaked and gorged, that Tommaso threw back there in a corner, in the midst of that crowd of unfortunates, did a little hope still seem to shine.

Waking up late in the morning, Tommaso immediately felt that he wasn't well, that he was dead tired, with sore bones. He couldn't bring himself to open his eyes or raise his knees to get out of bed.

He stood there, as if made of wood, a little longer, thinking. It must have been a little past eleven, no voices or noises could be heard, and the weather must have still been bad, because little light was coming through the window. A few sirens sounded in the distance. «Come on, come on!» Tommaso said to himself, curious to go to the village to see what it was like, what was happening.

As he struggled to get up, he developed a cough, and immediately another. "Damn you!" he muttered to himself, disgusted. He coughed again, and his mouth felt as if he had touched it with a dirty hand: a taste like cold iron, nails. Tommaso cupped his mouth, to get rid of that foul taste, and bent down to put on his shoes. But, instead of decreasing, the iron flavor increased, it became increasingly sweeter. «What, did I eat boogers last night?» Tommaso asked himself, pressing his tongue against the roof of his mouth. But then, unwillingly, his eyes focused on his undershirt, and he saw that it was all stained red. It was blood. When he had been ill, he had never had bleeding. At first it seemed like a dream to him: he looked and looked at those bloodstains, and touched them with his finger: it was fresh, it was sticky.

“But what is it?” she said. She was already trembling, already worried that she couldn't see anymore. It didn't take him long to understand what he was: another coughing outburst, stronger than the first, she shook him, knocking him out.

As soon as he finished, he got up and ran to the toilet. At home, he was alone, at that hour, there was no one, because everyone was at work. As he walked he noticed that he was miraculously holding himself up: but he continued all the same to the toilet, to look at himself in the mirror. He was all covered in blood, his beard, his neck, his undershirt. “God mother!” he almost shouted, white with fright.

He passed, shaking, holding onto the walls, into the kitchen, went to the sink, took a rag, soaked it and began rubbing his face and his undershirt: he scrubbed, scrubbed, until he thought he had gotten rid of the stains. But then another cough, which he couldn't handle because the back of his throat made a tingling sound like a burning iron, tossed him around like a gust of

wind: and more blood down his face and onto his chest. Tommaso waited to finish coughing, and then cleaned himself up again.

He remained still for a while, collapsed, next to the sink, with the tap open and the dishes dirty: his cough didn't return, and then, step by step, after having wrung out the rag and soaked it in clean water, he moved towards his room. , he went to throw himself back on the cot.

He remained there long, still, with his face up and his legs stretched out, with the wet rag on the clothes chair. He couldn't think straight, he was so heartbroken: he was just waiting, with all his soul, for someone to come back, for his mother to come back, for them to help him. But he was under no illusions, he knew well what was happening to him. "I'm dying!" he thought.

For an hour and a half he remained still, without moving, without lifting a finger: finally he heard the door opening, and his mother entered. "Ma," said Tommaso, "I feel sick, go and call the doctor!"

"Hate!" Sister Maria shouted, seeing him, and realizing that she was really sick: she looked at him for a moment, not knowing what to say, with her mouth trembling, as if she were about to burst into tears.

«Hurry up, go and get the doctor, damn it to you!» Tommaso shouted. Sister Maria said: «Yes, yes, stay well!» she turned, and almost ran again, covering her face with her hands. Tommaso remained there, still as before, for almost another hour. Meanwhile, his father and brother had arrived from work, hungry. As soon as they saw that the food was not ready, and that Tommaso was feeling ill, they sat there in his room, and remained silent, looking at him every now and then, waiting for the doctor to arrive.

This one finally arrived, visited Tommaso, touched him all over, asked for information on when he had been tubercular. He was serious, it was clear that there was nothing to joke about. Meanwhile Tommaso had developed another coughing fit, and he coughed and coughed, dirtying blood all over the rag he had in his hand, and then the pillowcase, which his mother had run to get from the cupboard, not finding handkerchiefs and towels.

The doctor said it was better to take him to the hospital, and immediately: Sister Maria felt her knees tremble, and she fell with her hands onto the bed, on top of her son's body. This was the third time they had taken her to the hospital in a year. But there was nothing to be done: after two hours Tommaso was already in a bed at the Polyclinic.

For two days he stayed like this, he had blood showers every moment, but he always hoped: the first time he was cured, and he could do it the second time too. He didn't want to convince himself that they should make a grave for him. Now then he was chewing on hospitals, and he knew what he had to say and what he had to do, to get respect. From day one he made sure they didn't miss out on anything he was entitled to. He stood there with his chin stretched out, his eyes wide open, fighting against the tingling that came when he was about to pass out. Instead he was getting sicker and sicker.

On Sunday, Irene also came to visit him, with her friend Diasira, and with Settimio. She brought him some fruit and some Marsala, waiting a moment while hers weren't there, and put it there on the bedside table for him, in silence. The other two were silent too.

Tommaso, dry as a child, under the stretched cloths, did nothing but look out the window: he didn't say a word.

Submissive as always, Irene stood dejectedly looking at him for a while, speaking in a whisper to the little girl: then she couldn't help herself and, hiding her face against her arm, she began to cry, to cry. And since there was complete silence in the ward, her crying could be heard loudly all around, everyone turned to look. Holding her close, Diasira tried to calm her down, but Irene could no longer support herself, despite the fact that she was now crying softly, with a little girl's wail: she knew she shouldn't do it, that she wasn't fit, and she hid her face with her hand, always more desperate: until they took her away.

Even those from the party came to visit him: they had already agreed that, if Tommaso died, they would put his name in the Pietralata section, for the good deed he had done, and for which he was now paying so dearly. All wasted and in bad shape, there was also Lello, and Zucabbo, fresh as an apple that had just fallen from the tree, curled up under the curl of the bleached hair that he had.

Of the village, Tommaso only learned that a minister had gone there to visit it, on that bed of dry swamp that covered it: he had made the usual promises, and, in the meantime, those left homeless had been distributed a little in some convent, some in some school, where there were already other slum dwellers.

After the elders had said goodbye and left, Lello and Zucabbo remained there for a while longer, without deciding to leave him. In the end Zucabbo

put a few pears and two bananas out of his pocket: that's why they were so immobile, and didn't know what to say. «Do you bring me fruit?» Thomas asked. «What are you doing? You must bring them flowers to me!»

«Stop it, Puzzi!» Zucabbo told him, placing the pears and bananas on the bed: but she couldn't help but cry, and he too.

«What the... you're crying, if there's anyone here who should cry, it's me», said Tommaso. "That? Are you going to die?"

With shining eyes in those forced faces, burnt by the sun and hunger, Lello and Zucabbo were still there, they didn't move.

"But get away!" said Thomas. «Instead of keeping me company, go and break your horns, because today is Sunday!»

He turned his face away, and didn't speak anymore.

But to die, he had made it a point that he had to die in his bed at home: and in fact, they gave him permission to bring him back easily now. It was a beautiful, sweet, sweet day at the end of September, with the sun shining in the sky without a blemish, and people chatting, singing, in the streets, in the new blocks of flats.

As Tommaso returned to his bed, he almost seemed to feel a little better. Deep down they still hadn't blessed him; for a few hours his cough had stopped, and he had also asked his mother for some of that marsala that Irene had brought him. But then, as it became night, he felt worse, more and more: he got a new clot of blood, coughed, coughed, without taking another breath, and goodbye Tommaso.

Warning

The references to individual people, events and real places described here are the result of invention: however, I would like it to be clear to the reader that what he has read in this novel has, in essence, really happened and really continues to happen.

I thank the "boys of life" who, directly or indirectly, helped me write this book, and in particular, with true gratitude, Sergio Citti.